

APPROACH TO POETRY

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BY

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PREFACE

THIS book has been written in the belief that it will be of practical assistance to students and teachers of poetry. I hope that I have at least brought together some tendencies which have already revealed their significance, both in the study of poems and in the teaching of poetry in schools. On every page my debt to certain critics is obvious; but my other debt—to all those who have given me the benefit of their advice and experience—is just as important. Particularly I wish to thank Mr. F. Grice, whose least contribution to this book has been the matter he has so generously placed at my disposal, and whose greatest is a friendship that has been constant since the time we both started to read anything at all. I wish also to thank the Editor of *The Schoolmaster* for permission to use material which first appeared as a series of articles in his journal.

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PART I

THE STUDY OF POETRY

CHAPTER I

WORDS AND POEMS

THE appreciation of a poem is one thing, the teaching of a poem is quite another. That no poem will ever be properly taught that has not first been properly appreciated by the teacher goes without saying; but many teachers make the mistake of thinking that if they can demonstrate to their pupils how much they personally like the poem, the class's appreciation will follow automatically. Two complementary classroom procedures occur to them as possible methods for the poetry lesson. According to the one, the class is told that the poem is a good one, shown that it is a good one, and then whether they like it or not given the poem to learn. According to the other, the lovely poem is ecstatically recited, rhapsodically expounded, and enthusiasm is present equally in its hail and farewell: tired but happy, and a little dazed at the fervour of this emotional bank-holidaying, the class is still given the poem to learn. In each case it has been forgotten that the appreciation aimed at in the poetry lesson should be an appreciation by the children. The "appreciation" is something that happens inside the mind of each individual in the classroom as a result of reading a poem and having direct access to a writer's meaning. To attain this direct relationship between the poem and each reader is the sole end of the poetry lesson. All the teacher's methods are merely means to this end; they form a kind of apparatus set up to enable the children to get an adequate view of the poem for themselves. Teaching is necessary, as children can now no longer (as they may have been able to at one time) acquire poetry naturally, as they naturally acquire the interest in and

taste for jazz. They must be equipped in the classroom with the skill necessary for understanding that part of our social heritage which comes down to us in poetry, and with the skill, too, that will enable them to recognise the deficiencies of their environment, and set out to remove them. Teaching is necessary, for children can be helped to see for themselves; but all that the teacher says and does in the lesson, all the devices resorted to in the managing of the poem and the class—his entire apparatus—should collapse as soon as its purpose is fulfilled. Nothing should remain but the “appreciation” which has been achieved—the response the children make to the writer’s words.

It is often assumed that the poetry lesson calls for “gush”, that enthusiasm which is all the more demonstrative for being anxious about its own vagueness. Actually the opposite is the case: the poetry lesson demands, if anything, a dry, wary, emotionally spare technique—and this for a very good reason. It is the only lesson in which the end proposed is an actual experience communicated from one mind (not the teacher’s) to another. This being so, everything that is not facilitating the appropriate response will be positively harmful. In the poetry lesson more than in any other, paradoxically enough, emotionalism is out of place, or any tendency to play on the class’s feelings—even when this springs from a good intention to “build up the right atmosphere”. Feeling is only in place in the poetry lesson when the poem is actually being read, either silently or aloud, by the teacher or by the class. And it must be feeling known to be derived from the poet’s words.

The teaching of poetry is only a branch of a much wider activity—the training of the child as a reader, receiving from words all that words transmit, feeling and discriminating between feelings, experiencing and judging experiences, realising a world that takes on shape and definition, becoming capable of controlling that world in proportion as the shape and definition develop.

Dealing rightly with words as a reader is an operation that

requires much more skill than is widely recognised. Dr. I. A. Richards in his *Practical Criticism* has shown how general are the phenomena of bad reading or of mis-reading. Bishops, undergraduates, and literary critics—all can fail on occasion to respond correctly to the written word, especially the written word as used by all those persons, from poets and prophets to politicians and sales-pushers, who are not merely using language as the vehicle for matter-of-fact information. Classroom examples are not far to seek. A class of boys (13-14 years of age) was asked to comment on the following poem (not previously taught):

EPITAPH

Here lieth the noble warrior
Who never blooded sword;
Here lieth the noble councillor
Who never kept his word;
Here lieth His Excellency
Who ruled all the State;
Here lieth the Earl of Leicester
Whom all the world doth hate.

The class was asked to say what sort of a person the writer thought the Earl to be. Several were of the opinion that the poet admired and approved of him, while one boy volunteered the information that the Earl "was a good, peace-loving man, and one that must have done a lot of good for his district."

What are words? What are some of the considerations likely to be of importance when we are reading words in poems? Nothing like an adequate answer to either of these questions will be attempted here: for that the interested reader might refer to the work of Dr. I. A. Richards. The questions are raised merely to draw attention to themselves as questions which do require answers from teachers of poetry. And the first beginnings of answers to them will not fail to throw light on what the teaching of poetry, or the teaching of reading, involves.

Words—even spoken words—are only a fragment of the

complete situation in which communication takes place. Communication of certain wishes, intentions, feelings and thoughts can sometimes take place without words being used at all. Bassanio obviously could and did receive from Portia what he afterwards called "fair speechless messages". Words are uttered with an accompaniment of facial expressions, gestures, and tones of voice—all of which give the listener, the person spoken to, indications of how the words are to be taken. How the words are to be taken is the all-important thing. Alter the tone of voice or the facial expression in the reporting, and as every trouble-making gossip knows, the whole meaning of the words can be altered: something is communicated which the original speaker never intended. With the written word we have the aids neither of facial expression and gesture, nor of tone of voice to help us. All these belong to the complete situation of which the written words are a fragment. It is the reader's task as a reader to reconstruct the complete whole from the fragment. In the reading lesson or in the poetry lesson—where in each case the written words are being once more uttered—this is called "giving the words their proper expression," i.e. making the given words the inevitable utterance of a particular person in a particular situation addressing a particular audience.

The normal adult readily assumes that his ability to reconstruct the complete context from the fragment is something that he has acquired quite naturally and instinctively. Yet actually it is a skill he has learned, and learned badly or well according to whether he has attended or not attended to the ways in which he has heard words used by every one of that vast assemblage of people who have spoken to him during his life. A convenient example might be taken from "Coriolanus". Here are two descriptions of the same event, Coriolanus's triumphant reception by the Plebs. The speaker in one case is Coriolanus's bitterest opponent, and in the other a Herald making a suitably enthusiastic and approving report of the crowd's welcome:

"All tongues speak of him, and the bleared sights
 Are spectacled to see him: your prattling nurse
 Into a rapture lets her baby cry
 While she chats him: the kitchen malkin pins
 Her richest lockram 'bout her reechy neck
 Clambering the walls to eye him: stalls, bulks, windows,
 Are smother'd up, leads filled, and ridges horsed
 With variable complexions; all agreeing
 In earnestness to see him: seld-shown flamens
 Do press the popular throngs, and puff
 To win a vulgar station: our veil'd dames
 Commit the war of white and damask in
 Their nicely gauded cheeks, to the wanton spoil
 Of Phœbus' burning kisses: such a pothor
 As if that whatsoever god that leads him
 Were slily crept into his human powers,
 And gave him graceful posture."

and:

"You are sent for to the Capitol. 'Tis thought
 That Marcius will be consul. I have seen
 The dumb men throng to see him, and
 The blind to hear him speak: matrons flung gloves,
 Ladies and maids their scarves and handkerchers,
 Upon him as he pass'd: the nobles bended
 As to Jove's statue; and the commons made
 A shower and thunder with their caps and shouts:
 I never saw the like."

Who says which? The reader of average experience will have decided already, unconsciously. For the reader at the beginning of his career it would not be so easy, as every teacher of reading and every producer of school plays knows. Often it is only when children ask why this or that passage must be read in this or that way, that we realise how much we might have been taking for granted. And it is then that we must be able to

return to the written words and find demonstrable justifications. We have to become conscious of all those things of which, in the process of the mature "instinctive" interpretation, we were unconscious.

That this demonstrable justification is at all possible is due to one thing: the fact that words differ widely among themselves, and are not all equally appropriate to any situation. They have a character of their own. The "fragment," if the words have been put together by a capable writer, will only fit into the "whole" to which it belongs. The written word can indicate almost as unambiguously as the spoken word how it is to be taken. Thus, in the "Coriolanus" passages, we can tell which of the speakers is looking with the bilious eye, angry and contemptuous. The various items to which he draws our attention are such as a person wanting to vent spleen would seize upon first—the near-sighted anxiously fumbling for their spectacles in order to get a better view; the nurse-maids, silly and garrulous, going into raptures to each other about the public hero while the babies cry themselves quite unheeded into fits; the servant girl hastily putting her cheap finery about her dirty neck while at the same time she clambers up the wall; the stately priests pressing and puffing to the front of the crowd in unseemly fashion; usually dignified dames throwing back their veils from their faces and craning forward to see and be seen by him. There can be little doubt as to the unsavouriness of the scene depicted here, or of the attitude of the speaker to what he is describing. To see how far the effect of the passage is due to the words used as pointers to the various items brought together, the passages need only be put side by side. The "bleared sights", comically "spectacled", of the first passage, become the "blind" in the second—compelling respect, chastening, quieting, filling the *solicitous* bystanders with a sense of all they have to be thankful for. The "veil'd dames" become "matrons", and for the "prattling nurse" and the "kitchen malkin" we have "ladies and maids." The very sounds of the words indicate the differences in the

moods of the speakers: in the first passage, when they do not require to be lingered over while the speaker sneers, they demand to be expectorated rather than said: "the bleared sights are spectacted to see him." Shakespeare does not need to be acted—he only needs to be properly said.

First, then, as we can see from these two passages, a word is a sign for a thing: in poetry, as in scientific text-books, railway-guides, and on sign-posts, it directs our attention to some item or to some aspect of an item. All the effects the actual thing has on us, or any appropriate selection of these, can arise in connexion with the word. The word "dog"—as a sign for a thing—points to a certain domestic animal. How we respond to it will depend partly on what our experience of the animal has been. In poetry and the language of feeling generally it is possible for the same thing to be called by different names, according to the feelings we entertain towards the thing we are talking about, or towards the audience we are addressing. The Herald chose different words from those used by the Tribune. Members of parliament have to refer to "lies" as "terminological inexactitudes." The changing of labels as between any two things can be carried much farther than this—as far, in fact, as anyone at any time requires. It was not the familiar domestic animal, for example, but Shylock, that Antonio was referring to on one occasion when he used the word "Dog!". A word can summon up some thing for our attention; it can also reveal what is the attitude of the speaker to that thing, and even indicate what is the relation between the speaker and the person he is addressing—and all these things are parts of a word's "meaning."

The printed word is a series of marks on paper; and on rare occasions its actual appearance may adventitiously play a significant role. The "h" in "ghost" is for some a hushing intruder, making the word as spelt more "ghostly" than it would otherwise be. In Blake's poem the spelling "Tyger" might be another instance of appropriateness in the appearance of a word. It tends to emphasise the strangeness of the creature.

To many it seems a more ferocious spelling than ours. The "y" has a forked stripiness very fittingly tigerish—besides standing up like a black branching tree "in the forests of the night."

The printed word stands for the spoken word, and the sound of a word is important in poetry on almost every occasion. As sounds, words in poetry fit into rhythms, make rhymes, form patterns. As rhythms they heighten our emotional sensitiveness, rendering us thereby more responsive to their various suggestions. As a pattern of sounds they operate a kind of selective machinery; they admit certain things, and exclude others, they make certain effects possible and others impossible. The classical example of this is the Spenserian stanza: it would be impossible for the Spenserian movement to lend itself to such explosive and snarling outbursts as that of the "Coriolanus" passage.

The word as a sound may tap another reservoir of emotive power, in addition to those suggested by its rhythm and pattern-making propensities. Sir Richard Paget¹ brings together a great deal of evidence for the theory that all speech originated in descriptive gesture-language. The expressive gestures once performed by the hands come to be performed by the speech organs, so that the movements of the latter are still (unconsciously) descriptive of things. The words "push" and "pull" are good illustrations. In "push" there is a front-grip followed by a pouting forward of the lips and (in the final "sh") a continuous outgoing of air. In "pull" there is the same front-grip followed by the reverse kind of movement. Certain groups of sounds, it has also been pointed out, seem to have a special emotive character. Initial "sn" is almost restricted, for example, to the names of objects that are unpleasant or disgusting—"sneer, snake, snail, snout, snub, snort, snarl, sneak, snob, snifle, snigger." So one's interest in the sounds of words used in poetry can go beyond onomatopœia.

Because sound is admittedly important in poetry, some have been led to lay a misplaced emphasis upon it. A notion that

¹ See *Human Speech*.

poetry is simply the "music" of words plays a large part in writings about it, and in the treatment it receives in the classroom. One critic has said that the whole art of poetry consists in the proper management of the sound "s." Several children leave school with ideas only slightly more inclusive than that: they seem to have gathered a general impression that it is the sign of a good poem if "l,m,n,r" are all well represented: the "liquids" are a reliable guarantee of "word-music."

This theory in connexion with the "word-music" of poetry has been particularly devastating because it has tried to separate the "music" of the words from the other factors which make that "music" (or, for that matter, lack of "music") significant. The sound of a word never acts in isolation; it always co-operates with something else. The sound of the word is never only a sound, it is always a meaning also. This, from the standpoint of the teacher in the classroom, is a piece of good fortune. Children will either be puzzled or bored with vague demonstrations of, or abrupt dogmatisations about "music" in words, but they will be excited and intrigued by a discreet use of Paget's theory, say, which helps them to see how even the sounds produced by their vocal organs can play an important part in the poem. Let us, if only by way of *tour de force*, attempt an application of this general principle to a well-known poem, Ariel's Song from *The Tempest*:

"Full fathom five thy father lies;
Of his bones are coral made;
Those are pearls that were his eyes:
Nothing of him that doth fade
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange.
Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell:
(Ding, dong)

Hark! now I hear them—

Ding-dong bell."

The general setting of the poem is familiar enough.

Ferdinand, the young prince, cast up on the shore of Prospero's island, believes himself to be the sole survivor of a wreck in which he has lost his father and all his friends. The invisible Ariel is pursuing him with songs in the air, intended to woo the young prince from his grief and release his mind in readiness for the new experiences he will meet with on the island, once he has been lured to Prospero.

A vivid method of demonstrating to a class that it is the particular words of the poem which are responsible for the effects it has, is to get them to compose a "dictionary translation." Everybody knows that the words listed in the dictionary are supposed equivalents for each other—they all "mean the same." When the dictionary equivalents are substituted for Shakespeare's words (any dictionary-conscious class in the senior school can do this for themselves) the result will be something like the following:

"Quite thirty feet deep your male parent reposes. The hard substance which composes his skeleton has become the calcareous structure secreted by certain polyps in masses on the bottom of the sea. What were his organs of sight are now the hard, round, lustrous objects found in several bi-valves (but especially in the oyster).

"There is no particle of him which vanishes gradually which does not undergo an alteration characteristic of and peculiar to the ocean and ocean creatures—a transformation into something abounding in qualities pleasing to the senses, and unusual.

"Youthful female divinities of the ocean, at intervals of an hour, sound the bell which is rung at funerals. (Ding, dong). Listen! I hear them at it now!—Ding-dong bell."

The translation has altered the sounds, the rhythm, and the rhyme. The substituted words differ also from those of the poem in that they are drawn from different spheres of discourse, they have different histories, different values in the currency of speech. In isolating the dictionary meaning of the poem we

seem to have singled out the factor that will least help us to arrive at the full meaning of Shakespeare's words. What must be demonstrated is how "Full fathom five thy father lies", taken in its context, does work which "Quite thirty feet deep your male parent reposes" would fail to do.

The demonstration can conveniently begin with an analysis, first, of the vowels and consonants of the line.

The vowel-sounds (-u, -a, -ai, -ai, -a:, -ai) are mainly long, low, and heavily moving—mournful, as befits a dirge, and swinging heavily and monotonously like huge, slow volumes of water. (The poem is not only a dirge but also a sea-dirge, and the death has been a death-by-water). The consonants are without exception continuants—only one of them unvoiced—and they recur in a significant pattern:

(f - l) (f th m) (f v th) (f th l) (z)

It would be idle to tell the class that this is "alliteration": alliteration is as alliteration does.

The line does not fall naturally into regular metric feet when it is being said. Each word must be given almost the same amount of stress. The only metric division is a slight breath-pause (cæsura) after "five." The analysis could be tabulated on the blackboard as follows:

Stress	/	/	/	/	/	/
Consonants	(f - l)	(f th m)	(f v th)	(f th l)	(z)	
Vowels	u	a	ai	ai	a:	ai
Line	Full fathom five thy father lies					

The implicit gesture-language of these sounds hints at the dramatisation of something which is meant to be soothing and consolatory. The Prince's father, if he did go down in the

wreck, met his death amid all the clash and violence of storm. The sea we hear in the first lines of the poem, however, is neither angry nor violent. And just as, later, the song suggests that sea-nymphs are ringing the dead Duke's knell, so here in its rhythms it suggests that his death and burial have taken place fittingly and appropriately, accompanied by the measured ceremonial sorrow of a state-funeral procession.

But the vowel and consonant groups of the first line hint at things more definite still, and all of them the well-meaning distortions of a sympathiser calculating his words to make the grief of the bereaved less bitter.

The vowel "-u," according to Paget, is the pointing-vowel (as in "you," "tu," "du" etc.). Through the first word of the line, then we are pointed away—away out to sea, and away down to the depths of the sea. The repeated "f" sound (a lip-teeth front-grip) suggests the sinking down through fathom after fathom, until rest is reached, in the long monosyllable at the end of the line, on the ocean floor. The sequence of sounds taken all together is almost a verbal miming of the act of sea-burial. The act of paying out rope (as in taking soundings, or lowering some heavy object) is aptly imitated: the "-f"s being the successive grips, and the smooth running-out of the rope being imaged in the continuants which follow. The back-vowels coming after the "-u" can suggest the leaning back of people taking the strain while committing the body to the sea, or the natural shrinking of the bereaved who are loth to follow the painful act too closely. The voice talks about the death of Ferdinand's father as if it had been not an unhoused, perilous departure, but an orderly, well-conducted, and proper burial: so that the prince has nothing to feel unduly bitter about: it is his duty now to reconcile himself to the fact and be comforted.

Perversely ingenious, pedantic, or wildly fantastic as the above exploration of the hinterland of Shakespeare's line might seem, as a matter of actual fact most of it was volunteered by a normal class of 13-14 years. They had been introduced to Paget's theory of language (to sharpen their interest in the

workings of the speech organs) in a previous speech-training lesson.

The first three lines of the poem are all pitched in the same key. The next three lines (the poem naturally divides itself into three movements) are transitional. Their movement is swifter and lighter, though in "sea-change" and "strange" we have echoes from the heavy droning sea of the first stanza. The word "rich" is placed between "Something" and "strange"—words of a dim, blurred, low sound, against which the sharpness, distinctness, and brightness of "rich" stand out in abrupt contrast: like some bright object in a dim and swimming medium, or, as one boy said, like coral on the bottom of the sea.

In the last lines the poem passes to a quite different sort of music, ending on the almost gamesome note of "Ding, dong, bell"—the refrain of the nursery-rhyme—which celebrates a slighter occasion when death-by-water was averted and sorrow issued in relief. Sea-nymphs, who combine sportiveness with their divinity, ring the knell. (Sextons are earthier creatures, just as the grave is a close, smothering, cramping place compared with the sea, where creatures can move both gracefully and unhampered). The Duke has been removed from the medium of flesh and decay, transformed into something both imperishable and precious, and is in delightful company. The twist from sorrow, through wonder, to awakening delight, which it is the singer's aim to bring about, is finally achieved. The sound of *Ding-dong bell* (twining itself in Ferdinand's mind with echoes from his childhood) wanders back away from the sea, the drowned father and the nymphs, to earth again.

It was Coleridge who said that the "sense of musical delight" is the greatest gift of the imagination. On another occasion, writing after he had just been listening to Wordsworth reading some of his own poetry, he says it seemed "like thoughts to their own music chanted". The two remarks must be taken as complementary. Coleridge was insisting that what we call the "music of words" in poetry is actually the music of the thoughts

and feelings—the meanings of the words—as well as the sounds. We say, as Ignatius shrewdly remarked, that we are training “the ear” or “the eye,” whereas really we are training the whole man—to hear or to see.

The plain man’s scepticism on the subject of the close relation between sound and sense in poetry was voiced by Dr. Johnson. Discussing the poet Cowley’s claim that in two passages:

“Brass was his helmet, his boots brass, and o’er
His breast a thick plate of strong brass he wore.”

and

“Like some fair pine o’er-looking all th’ignobler wood,”

an attempt had successfully been made to relate sound and sense, Johnson remarks:

“A *boundless* verse, a *headlong* verse, and a verse of *brass* or of *strong brass*, seem to comprise very incongruous and unsociable ideas . . . I cannot discover . . . why the pine is taller in an Alexandrine than in ten syllables.”

The fact would seem to be, however, in spite of Johnson’s scepticism, that the sound of a word (the way in which we feel it to be important as a sound) is obviously never dependent merely on the aural and muscular imagery which the articulation of it provides. The sound of a word to our mental ear depends also on all the meaning that attaches to it in its context. There is nothing illogical, for example, in saying that in Shakespeare’s line the same sounds can indicate, all at the same time, such diverse things as the sea, a funeral procession, the chant of a mourner, and the act of committal. A word is everything, that it is, and also everything that it is not. (“Sea-nymph” is sea-nymph, but it also *is not* sexton, or whale, or aeroplane.) The teacher’s task in the poetry-lesson is to train the child’s ear certainly, but in doing this not to forget that the ear is a part of the mind.

CHAPTER II

METRE

THERE is some academic discussion whether or not it is advisable to introduce children to "prosody" as a part of the equipment which they will find useful in dealing with poetry. Admittedly younger children enjoy strongly rhythmic writing, but will their interest be equally maintained by an examination of the prosodic principles at the basis of poetic rhythms? An answer to this question *ex cathedra* might be forgiven: there is no point in teaching prosody for prosody's sake, and—to go to even more dangerous extremes of dogmatisation—there is little point in teaching "metre" if the aim is not to get the class itself to undertake metrical composition. The lessons on metre should introduce the child to the conception of poetry as something that men make up: the poet is a craftsman, and by examining his work we can learn some of its secrets and turn out work like it of our own. The rhythms the ear detects in poetry are the result of conscious control, deliberation, and arrangement.

One of the minor pitfalls in connexion with metre is that very few good poems (in their natural movement) fall into regular iambics or dactyls or amphibracs. If a fair amount has already been done in poetry-speaking to eradicate mechanical sing-song, there is always the danger that the teaching of metre will resurrect it. The danger, however, is not very great if the grounding in natural verse-speaking has been thorough, and if the treatment of metre is tactful.

Another danger is that the teaching of metre will unconsciously inculcate the false idea that the poet "has made a mistake" if his lines do not fall into the "correct" prosodic units. It might be difficult to make the point that "metrical perfection" defeats its own ends if the perfection is merely a matter of mechanical accuracy. Metre exists only as a scheme

of regularly recurring stresses—which is there to be departed from in interesting ways as occasion demands. Expectations are aroused in order to be answered and defeated, and metrical perfection really consists in the cunning warp and woof of expected and unexpected. There must always be this tension. The poems that are “metrically perfect” in a mechanical sense are in general comparatively crude in the satisfaction they give: e.g. “Young Lochinvar” and “The Assyrian came down.” Poems can, however, be “metrically perfect” in a way that is not a blemish. We are surprised to discover, on looking back over them, that some poems have had a regular metrical basis from which they have never departed. In these cases there is generally some other feature that supplies the tension. In Byron’s “Don Juan,” for example, the poet deliberately makes it seem impossible time after time that his pattern can ever be carried out, only to force words into it at the last moment, by a splendid *tour de force*, doing violence often to normal speech rhythm, or to pronunciation, in order to achieve that impossible rhyme we are relieved to see occurring, or the five iambs per line that his stanza requires. Here the tension is supplied by balancing the mechanical carrying-out of a metrical scheme against the imminent collapse of that scheme at every point. Browning (who carried on the tradition of Byron into the nineteenth century) is also chiefly notable (prosodically speaking) in this direction. The metre of “Saul” is a cunning reconciliation of normal speech, the stress of persuasive rhetoric, with the anapæstic scheme used in an entirely different way, for example, in “How we brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix.” Metre is not something which, in the last analysis, can be separated from the structure of the poem or from the experience which the verbal system of the poem is building up. The prosody of a poem, when it is important, is only important in so far as it can be shown to be related to the other features of the poet’s technique, and to all those ideas, attitudes, and feelings he is communicating. Thus the prosody of “Don Juan” is directly related to the complex

way of feeling a whole manifold of things that distinguishes Byron's poem: Byron's attitude to himself, to his readers, and to the world that embraces both, the multiple irony which not least includes himself, the contempt complicated by tenderness, the critical alertness and the deliberately uncritical indulgence—all this would have to be considered and related to his "prosody".

This kind of treatment of metre is, of course, only possible with fairly advanced classes, and it is for this reason that metre should be taught to the eleven-plus class as an introduction to metrical efforts of their own. In this way prosodic accuracy is presented as a thing for their convenience, and not erected into a standard by which the finished craftsman of poems can be "judged."

Curiously enough, as an introduction to verse-making, metre can excite the interest and enthusiasm of the class. Molière's character was surprised and delighted to discover that he had been speaking "prose" all his life. Children get the same shock of delight when they realise that they cannot speak without making rhythms of strong and weak syllables—and that this is the key to "poems".

The start has to be made with splitting words up into syllables; for it is a thing not generally known, before the age of eleven and after the age at which the process of learning to read in the Primary Department has been forgotten, that there is only one syllable in "wit" and two in "whistle." Ten minutes oral and written practice (with use of the blackboard) should be sufficient to fix the notion of syllables. Then the difference between "strong" and "weak" syllables must be displayed. This is more difficult. Everything depends upon the ability of the class to hear properly, and accurate hearing in the matter of stresses is at first not general. Many examples will have to be given, both of single polysyllabic words, and of small groups of one-syllable words like "I don't think so", or "You will like this". With the phrases it is advisable to show how the stress can be naturally shifted from one word to another, with a consequent change of meaning.

As soon as the class can distinguish strong and weak syllables easily, regular patterns of strong and weak syllables should be made. These need not at first make any sort of sense, and will arise quite as if by accident from the haphazard or mixed analysis of words into strong and weak. Finally two lines like the following might appear on the board and be chanted ecstatically in unison by the class:

**POTATO DICTATOR TOMATO SPECTATOR
O'RILEY EUREKA NEW-FASHIONED INFLATOR.**

Or, when groups of words and single words are put together to make sense as well as a rhythmic pattern, a quatrain might emerge:

The man upon the bicycle
Was doing tricks fantastical;
A steam-engine ran o'er his head
And now the clever fellow's dead.

It is more than likely that this quatrain will be remembered by the class at the end of the period, and remain with them for the next lesson on metre.

It is not advisable to pause at this point to analyse poems into their component metrical parts. If this work is done at all it should come later, by way of revision, when most of the prosodic matter has been assimilated in other ways.

From the realisation that words can fall into rhythms of the POTATO DICTATOR TOMATO SPECTATOR type, the next step should be immediately to examine the various "feet". The sample line acquires its rhythm through repeating a certain pattern of strong and weak syllables—in this case weak-STRONG-weak weak-STRONG-weak weak-STRONG-weak weak-STRONG-weak. It is easy to imagine other patterns that could be similarly repeated—in fact all six of the typical "feet" found generally in English metrical writing.

The word "metre" might be introduced to the class at this point, when they have seen how rhythm comes from repeating a

pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables, and have decided on what possible patterns there might conceivably be. "Metre" means *measure*. (The *metric* system is the French *measuring* system.) The name is a good one because we can measure the lines of poetry; and we measure them off into *feet*. (Alternatively, poems, like anything else, run on their *feet*.) Feet can be of two syllables or of three syllables, and there can be only one strong beat in any one foot. (The spondee is an exception; but it is reserved until all the other feet have become familiar, and there is little danger of some member of the class electing to write his poem in spondees.)

The first feet to be described are those which contain two syllables—the Iambic foot and the Trochee. The Iambic is the walking measure:

"The ploughman homeward plods his weary way."

(How different the effect of that line would be if the words had been in some other order:

"Homeward the ploughman his weary way plods",

or if the measure had been trochaic:

"Weary ploughman homeward plodding").

The measure of those ballads known to the form is iambic, as is that of the Shakespeare play they will be reading. It is the most often used of all the measures, because it is the most adaptable. The Trochee (STRONG-weak) is the tripping measure:

"Lucy Locket lost her pocket,
Kitty Fisher found it".

The three-syllable feet are the Dactylic, Anapæst, and Amphibrac. Dactylic means "finger-foot"—so-called by the Greeks because, just as a finger has three joints, so the dactylic foot has three syllables, the first syllable being the strongest as the first joint in one's finger is the strongest. The best examples will be such as are improvised for the occasion:

"Birmingham town has a very fine hospital",

but there are literary examples:

"Hey diddle diddle, the cat and the fiddle",

or:

"Little Miss Muffet, she sat on a tuffet".

The only difficulty with the literary examples is that often (as in the nursery-rhyme instances) they fall short of the necessary number of weak syllables. Actually this missing weak syllable is present in the form of a slight pause at the end of the nursery-rhyme line. But it can be pointed out, in any case, that the main thing in metre is the strong beat: often there are silent "weak" syllables that take place only in our mind, and for which we make allowance as we are reading. All the nursery-rhymes show this quite clearly. You can easily say, without spoiling the run or tune of the line:

"HEY diddle DIDDLE, the CAT and the FIDDLE, the
COW-ow jumped O-ver the MOO-oo-oon".

"Anapæst" means "turned about" (weak-weak-STRONG) and is the opposite to the dactylic measure. Anapæsts form the basis of the galloping rhythm in:

"Oh (the) young Lochinvar has come out of the west",

or in:

"The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold"

or in:

"(O) I galloped, Dirck galloped, we galloped all three,
Not a word to each other, we kept the great pace,
Neck by neck, stride by stride, never changing our place".

The Amphibrac (in pronunciation provisionally turned to am-PHIB-rac, to keep it clear of DAC-tylic) is the last variety

of foot possible in three syllables—possibly the only justification for mentioning it. The strong beat has been at the beginning and the end, and now it is placed in the middle of the foot. Amphibracs, though fairly common if we look for them in lines that have an anapæstic basis, are not themselves very often the main metrical feature of any English poem. They necessitate “feminine” rhyme, and the genius of the language does not lend itself kindly to this, unless for an intentionally “dying fall”. If an anapæstic line has one weak syllable missing from the beginning, and if the rhyme is feminine, the result will be a line of amphibracs:

“We sat down and wept by the waters
Of Babel, and thought of the day
When our foe in the hue of his slaughters
Made Salem’s high places his prey;
And ye, O her desolate daughters!
Were scatter’d all weeping away.”

An amphibrac (and every other type of foot) is tessellated into the perversely elaborate scheme of Meredith’s “Love in the Valley”:

“Lovely are the curves of the white owl sweeping
Wavy in the dusk lit by one large star,
Lone on the fir-branch, his rattle-note unvaried,
Brooding o’er the gloom, spins the brown eve-jar.”

The only intentional amphibracs, as far as the class, or anyone else, need be concerned, are Shakespeare’s:

“Most friendship is feigning, most loving mere folly,
Then heigh-ho the holly,
This life is most jolly.”

When the class has been introduced to all the measures—and two lessons at the outside should be sufficient for this, as the acquiring of the names and formulæ is mere memory work—they may, before undertaking their own verse-composition,

examine assorted poems, marking off first the syllables (a pencilled line), then the strong beats, and finally the feet (a vertical inked line). The realisation that all the poems they know are composed of the various metrical units they know, will be calculated to give them a sense of fellowship with the poet as craftsman. For the time being they are brother-technicians. The satisfaction of this feeling, and maybe the resultant readiness to consort with poets and take a further interest in their writings, are the only proper outcome of metrical analysis. Apart from these, little else of value can accrue, for prosody in itself is a desert of dry bones.

CHAPTER III

THE MAKING OF POEMS

THE immediate object of acquiring a knowledge of metre, it is maintained, should be to set the class off making poems for themselves. Since imitation is the unavoidable method by which the class can be got to make their poems, it is proposed in this chapter merely to indicate one or two models—poems with infectious patterns—which will make imitation as little hum-drum as possible. Verse-composition is not too great a strain to impose on any class of eleven-plus, and it need never be boring. If, for two or three lessons, the teacher is prepared to turn the classroom into a verse-factory, thirty boys will in the end have turned out thirty creditable “poems”, varying in quality as much as in length.

The most obvious type of poem to begin with is the ballad, unless something still less ambitious is thought advisable, when one or other of the Sea-shanties might be augmented or re-written. “Cheer’ly Men”, for example, suggests obvious extensions:

"Oh, Nancy Dawson, I-Oh,
 (Chee-lee men!)
 She robb'd the Bo'sun, I-Oh.
 (Chee-lee men!)
 That was a caution, I-Oh.
 (Chee-lee men!)
 Oh, hauly I-Oh,
 Chee-lee men!)

Oh Sally Racket
 Pawned my best jacket,
 Sold the pawn ticket.

Or there is "Hanging Johnny":

"Oh they call me Hanging Johnny,
 (Away, boys, away)
 They says I hangs for money.
 (Oh hang, boys, hang.)

And first I hanged my daddy,"

etc., etc.

Or "Boney was a warrior", or "Haul away, Joe".

The simplest ballad forms are best at the outset. These are very much akin to the Shanty in having two "story" lines alternating with some chorus. The story lines are of eight syllables, with four strong beats to the line, the chorus lines being generally shorter, with only three strong beats. The measure is mostly iambic; though if the necessary strong beats are there and the line runs well for the ear, it may be iambic or anapæstic, or a mixture of both; it won't much matter.

"There were twa sisters sat in a bower
 (Binnorie, O Binnorie)
 There cam a knight to be their wooer;
 (By the bonnie mill-dams o' Binnorie)

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He courted the eldest wi' glove and ring
 (Binnorie, O Binnorie)
 But he lo'ed the youngest aboon a' thing
 (By the bonnie mill-dams o' Binnorie)

Or:

"This ae nighte, this ae nighte,
 (Every nighte and alle)
 Fire and sleet and candle-lighte
 (And Christ receive thy saule).

When thou from hence away art past
 (Every nighte and alle)
 To whinny-muir thou comes at last,
 (And Christ receive thy saule)."

The first thing to do is to grasp the story. This might be the merest outline. A knight is riding through the wood in the twilight, when he sees a fair lady tied to a tree. The dragon is expected any minute. He breathes out fire and smoke and has green scales with red spots and yellow stripes, and intends to devour the fair lady. The knight, however, has come to the rescue. He awaits the dragon, and after a bloody combat in the dim dawn, despatches it. The knight rides off with the fair lady to his castle, there to make her his bride and live happily ever after.

The story having been settled, the next thing is the chorus. It must be impressed on the class that here they have unlimited scope. The chorus lines need have nothing whatever to do with the story, or, for that matter, with anything. They must simply "sound well"; and to do this they will have to have that rich hinterland of association which makes for "atmosphere": such a hinterland as that of either of the ballads already quoted, or of

"As the do'e flies ower the mulberry tree"

or:

"Oh, but the broom blooms bonnie".

The class, on their scraps of rough paper, begin to work out their chorus lines. When one line is worked out it is brought up for approval, and then the second line, which must have *absolutely no connexion* with the first, is tackled. It is better to insist on absolute lack of connexion (except maybe by some devious and subterranean channel), and so to lessen the possibilities of the two lines falling together as parts of some private second story that does not mix in any way with the original.

When the chorus lines are settled, the class can begin on the story. Individual attention is necessary at every step. Sometimes it will be a rhyme-word that cannot be discovered; sometimes the line will refuse to be compressed within the eight syllables allowed. The teacher then has a chance to point out how a word can be written in shortened form in poetry (*poetic licence*), or how sometimes "Lady fair" will fit into the metrical scheme better than "fair Lady" (*inversion*), or how it will be better to say "orange and green" at the end of a line rather than "green and orange" because there are no rhymes in the English language for "orange". In fact, the Devil's Advocate might say, the teacher will be writing thirty poems for the class instead of one. And the Devil's Advocate will be as right as he usually is and no more. The whole point about the poetry-making lesson is not that works of original poetic merit are being produced, but that new discoveries are being made about the machinery of language, and new experiments in composition are being undertaken as part of an enjoyable co-operative effort.

From this type of exercise, with chorus and story given, progression can be made to the type of ballad that has shed the chorus-line, and has become developed dramatic narrative. The individual members of the class should make up their own ballad-story now—maybe some incident in their own experience, or something from their reading. Or a play that they have performed may form the basis of their poem, in which case there will be occasion for description of characters and scene,

and for the incorporation of direct speech. At this stage there can be more emphasis on precision in metre and rhyme as a preparation for verse-composition where no story is being told, and where the accurate carrying-out of a metrical scheme will assume more importance.

The folk poems offer many good models for imitation in non-narrative poetry, just as they do in ballad. There is the "Temptation" poem, which gives an easy exercise in finding rhyming-words, and in building up a climax. One example of this sort is the song "Old woman, old woman, will you come a-walking?". Another is the very amusing Scots poem beginning:

"Whistle, whistle, old wife, and you shall have a hen"

"I wouldn't whistle," said the wife, "if you should give me ten."

The tempter here is presumably the Devil, or one of his witch-master agents. The prizes offered to the old woman for committing herself to the powers of darkness by whistling (an ominous sign in women) increase in their attractiveness until finally the Old Woman gives way:

"Whistle, whistle, old wife, and you shall have—a MAN."

"Wheep, whaup," said the wife, "I'll whistle if I can."

Then there is the "biggest lie" poem:

"Martin said to his man,

Fie, man, fie O,

Martin said to his man

Who's the fool now?

Martin said to his man,

Fill thou the cup

(And I the can)

Thou hast well drunken, man,

Who's the fool now?

I see a sheep a-bearing corn,
And a cuckoo blow his horn.

I see a man in the moon
Clouting of St. Peter's shoon.

I see a hare chase a hound
Twenty mile above the ground.

I see a goose ring a hog,
And a snail did bite a dog.

I see a mouse did catch the cat,
And the cheese to eat the rat."

This was a very popular type in the Middle Ages. It easily slides over into the fantastic pure and simple, or, as in the next example, can be given a satirical turn:

"When sparrows build churches and steeples high,
And wrens carry sacks to the mill,
Curlews carry clothes horses to dry,
And sea-mews bring butter to market to sell,
And wood-doves wear wood-knives, thieves to kill,
And griffins to goslings do obedience,
Then put in woman your trust and confidence."

De la Mare's "Silver" is a good model to take for the descriptive poem, if the vivid moonlit world in it can be said to be evoked by "description". Tennyson's "Mariana" might lend itself more easily to imitation:

"With blackest moss the flower-pots
Were thickly crusted, one and all;
The rusted nails fell from the knots
That held the pear to the gable-wall.
The broken sheds look'd sad and strange;
Unlifted was the clinking latch;
Weeded and worn the ancient thatch
Upon the lonely moated grange.

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About a stone-cast from the wall
 A sluice with blacken'd waters slept,
 And o'er it many, round, and small,
 The cluster'd marish mosses crept.
 Hard by a poplar shook alway,
 All silver-green, with gnarled bark;
 For leagues no other tree did mark
 The level waste, the rounding gray."

For a description of a person, such as turns the externals into indices of the innermost character, no better example could be given than any of the people in Chaucer's "Prologue". In all cases the accurate noting of specific items should be insisted on, as well as the coherence of the items among themselves for the furtherance of the effect intended. Where the writing of a lyric is proposed, it is helpful to have in mind something strongly patterned—if not the sophisticated Ballade and Triolet and Sonnet forms, then some sample not quite so involved as they, but equally clearly shaped, and with a structure if possible that is directly related to the structure of the experience the poem is intended to communicate. An example of this sort of clear structural pattern is Hardy's "Weathers".

It is advisable (the bow need not always be bent) to include along with the "serious" models some that are slighter, satirical, comic, tipped with venom maybe. Of these, apart from the limerick, there are good store. The following has a rich terseness:

Says Aaron to Moses,
 "Let's cut off our noses."
 Says Moses to Aaron,
 "'Tis the fashion to wear 'em".

The form of this poem is reminiscent of:

Says the Pont to the Blyth,
 "Where thou drowns one man, Aa drown five."
 Says the Blyth to the Pont,
 "The mair shame on't".

Then there are epitaphs, short biographies, spotlights on private peculiarities of a personal nature:

"Alfred de Musset
Used to call his cat 'Pusset'.
His accent was affected,
But that was to be expected."

and mottoes such as that of Pope's "Engraved on the Collar of a dog which I gave to His Highness":

"I am His Highness' dog at Kew;
Pray tell me, sir, whose dog are you?"

Byron left one pattern deliberately unfinished, possibly sensing the need there would be for later generations to add to its versicles:

"I read the 'Christabel';
Very well.
I read The Missionary';
Pretty—very.
I tried at 'Ilderim';
Ahem!
I read a sheet of 'Marg'ret of Anjou';
Can you?
I turned a page of Scott's 'Waterloo';
Pooh! Pooh!
I looked at Wordsworth's 'milk-white Rhylstone Doe';
Hillo!"
etc., etc.

CHAPTER IV

IMAGERY

THE verse-composition exercises will mark a stage in the developing interest of the class in poetry. They will have seen a

very rudimentary something of the poet's mystery, and other questions might be set stirring at this period in their minds: "Why do *poets* write poetry out of school?" Then the allied question might follow: "Why read poetry at all?"

Neither of the questions should be necessarily forced upon the class: it is better if they arise quite naturally at about the time the class is making a transition to the more sustained analytic investigation of its enjoyments. If the teacher senses any dim stirring of the interrogations, however, it will be wise to allow the topic to be opened up.

One way in which it might be broached is by way of introducing "Simile and Metaphor"—those poetry-lesson Pillars of Hercules. The two words, unfortunately, have become as inseparable a couple as Darby and Joan, Mutt and Jeff, pork and beans, fish and chips, or Laurel and Hardy. The class might as well know the terms. For one thing they are constantly being used in writings about poetry, and for another they are sometimes useful tabs or labels. But to start with them is dangerous. Very quickly all the embarrassments of an unnecessary precisionism will be entailed. The remote and often irrelevant problem of classification will tend to absorb the time and pains that could be better employed in examining the actual work done in its context by any particular simile, metaphor, image, comparison, association or allusion. The schoolmen's distinction between the pair is highly artificial and, worse still, misleading. The distinction generally made does not adequately take into account the varied subtlety of the ways in which imagery works. Even if it did, there would still be little use in establishing the two categories. It is a fallacy to imagine, for example (though it is still sometimes maintained), that a simile shows greater "imaginative power" than a comparison, and a metaphor more than either. Is Shakespeare being more imaginative on the subject of Perdita—"When you dance I wish you a wave o' the sea"—than he is when writing of the dead Cleopatra:

"She looks like sleep,
As she would catch another Antony
In her strong toil of grace"?

Why do poets write poetry out of school? The lesson might start with the general wonderment at its vaguest. There can be several replies: because it is considered clever to write poetry (and poets presumably want to show how clever they are); because they get their living by writing poetry. How do they make money by writing poetry?—because people buy their books.—Why?—Well, because they like poems, they enjoy reading poetry. Then why do poets write poems? Maybe because they too get some enjoyment from poetry—though in their case from writing it, not only from reading it. Poets enjoy making other people enjoy what they enjoy—making them enjoy, that is, sharing their experiences.

The important point to emphasise at this point in the discussion is *enjoyment*. Poetry would be neither read nor written if it were not for the pleasure involved. The pleasure may take all sorts of forms. It may be crude or complex: crude as the pleasure we take in the sheer agility and rollicking gusto of some swinging nonsense rhyme; or so complex that "pleasure" becomes scarcely the right word for the experience—as in the "enjoyment" of a tragedy. But all the time there is some sort of satisfaction, the sense of faculties powerfully and refreshingly exercised.

It is easy to make the point about "enjoyment" in dealing with the reader's experience as a reader; but how about the poet? Obviously "enjoyment" can be an end-stopped, self-complacent frame of mind, sufficient to itself, and involving no need for utterance. In addition to this, there is the obvious fact that the writer may be oppressed by some prompting experience, which starts him writing which can hardly in any sense of the term be called "enjoyable". And yet, at the same time, he will be committed as a poet to the task of utterance. So what about the poet?

A flanking attack on the problem might be the more prudent course. Have you ever had some special experience, some good time or bad time, and been full of it? What is the first thing you want to do? The reply is obvious: tell somebody about it, of course, tell him exactly *what it was like*. It is just this effort to tell somebody else *what it was like* that turns you into a poet. Everyone has had some special experience at some time—maybe something terrible like almost falling headfirst down a well, or something exciting like going on the “Giant Dipper” for the first time, or something that has filled him to overbrimming point with admiration or happiness or awe. And other people are just as eager to listen to accounts of these special experiences as the main actors in them are eager to tell: everyone wants to know *what it was like*.

The curious thing about special experiences of this sort, however, is this: because they are so *special* they are not absolutely *like* anything else that either the speaker or his audience may have encountered. It is difficult to say what they are like; and yet it is just these experiences that cry out so insistently to be described. So you start saying, “It was like this, and like this, and like this, and like that,” until your feeling runs out in all these efforts, and you feel fairly satisfied that some idea at least of what the original experience was *like* has been given.

Here is Falstaff, for example—the old comical rogue of a fat man in Shakespeare’s *Henry IV*, Part I—telling his fiery-nosed boon-companion, Bardolph, what the latter is like. We can see the host of queer shifts to which Falstaff is put, as he undertakes the task of giving Bardolph a clear impression of how Bardolph’s nose appears to Falstaff:

FALSTAFF: Do thou amend thy face, and I’ll amend my life: thou art our admiral, thou bearest the lantern in the poop—but ’tis in the nose of thee; thou art the Knight of the Burning Lamp.

BARDOLPH: Why, Sir John, my face does you no harm.

FALSTAFF: No, I'll be sworn; I make as good a use of it as many a man doth of a Death's Head or a *memento mori*: I never see thy face but I think upon Hell-fire, and Dives that lived in purple; for there he is in his robes, burning, burning. When thou runnest up Gadshill in the night to catch my horse, if I did not think thou had been an *ignis fatuus* or a ball of wild fire, there's no purchase in money. O thou art a perpetual triumph, an everlasting bonfire light! Thou hast saved me a thousand marks in links and torches, walking with thee in the night betwixt tavern and tavern: but the sack thou hast drunk would have bought me lights as good cheap at the dearest chandler's in Europe. I have maintained that salamander of yours with fire any time these two-and-twenty years; God reward me for it!

Bardolph, in virtue of his fiery nose, is first the Admiral's flagship, bearing the lantern in the poop; then, in hilarious succession, a Knight of the Burning Lamp, Dives in his purple amid the flames of hell, a will-o'-the-wisp, a ball of wild fire, a bonfire, a walking torch, and a salamander that can live in the midst of flame.

It is said that strong feeling makes poets of us all; and certainly Falstaff, once aroused, was speaking glorious poetry—and on a most unpromising subject. Everybody on occasion feels pressed to say what some special thing is like—to speak poetically. And in the act of doing so the whole world comes alive and reflects itself in a thousand ways in the thing that has been the exciting cause of the utterance. So that, when writing or when reading poetry, it very often becomes impossible to limit the poem to just this, or just that, that it is *about*. Something may have started it all; but the resulting poem contains both the prompting cause and all the awakened world that has come into life with it.

Here are two poems, in both of which the poet is telling us what something is *like*. The first is Ben Jonson's:

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"Have you seen but the white lily grow,
 Before rude hands have touched it?
 Have you seen but the fall of the snow
 Before the soil hath smutcht it?
 Have you felt the wool of the beaver,
 Or swan's down ever?
 Have you smelt the bud of the brier,
 Or nard in the fire?
 Have you tasted the bag of the bee?
 O so white, O so soft, O so sweet is she!

The second is an anonymous mediæval lyric, consisting in telling us three times, each time in a way that differs only slightly from the others, what a certain event was like:

I sing of a maiden
 That is makeles.
 King of al Kings
 To her son she ches.

He cam al so still
 Where his mother was
 As dew in Aprill
 That falleth on the grass.

He cam al so still
 To his mother's bower
 As dew in Aprill
 That falleth on the flower.

He cam al so still
 Where his mother lay
 As dew in Aprill
 That falleth on the spray.

Maiden and mother
 Was never none but she,
 Well may such a lady
 God's mother be.

Ben Jonson's poem is a good example of the simple poetical impulse to tell *what a thing is like*. The word "thing" must not be allowed to mislead us in this phrase. It must be remembered all the time that it always means such a thing as an "experience" is: the effects of an object on the mind of a spectator, of someone reacting strongly to its presence. It is the external thing *plus* the world that is awakened by it for the beholder's mind.

The poem is simple in construction, fairly easy to open up, an interesting "dating" exercise, and a good one to place alongside others on similar subjects for purposes of comparison. It has the further virtue (from the standpoint of the teacher in the classroom) of lending itself to blackboard tabulation.

A question such as "What has the last line got to do with the rest of the poem?" will quickly elicit the observation that the poet is trying to tell us about the whiteness, softness, and sweetness of the lady. The class can then read the poem through again, being warned that after this reading they will have to answer questions without referring to their books. A blackboard table is then drawn up showing "Whiteness," "Softness," and "Sweetness" in one column, and the illustrations of these three qualities in another. A third column indicates to which sense an appeal has been made. The completed table will then be:

WHITENESS	"lily" "snow"	SIGHT.
SOFTNESS	"wool of the beaver" "swan's down"	TOUCH.
SWEETNESS	"The bud of the brier" "nard in the fire" "the bag o' the bee"	SMELL. TASTE.

The usefulness of such a table as this is that it focusses attention on the items in the poem, on the imagery as a separable factor (for such time as we want to consider it in isolation), and on all

the imagery. Certain observations are thrust forward by it at a first glance. The poet is reacting with all his senses except one. He is a person whose senses are alive, all of them at the same time. The table says something relevant about the poem and the poet.

After the table has been drawn up the lesson can proceed to a further discussion of the various items that have been isolated, and the conclusions it is possible to draw from them. What sort of a sensibility is it? Is the poet repeating already-manufactured phrases, or can we tell from any indications whatsoever whether or not the poet has had actual experience of the things about which he is talking? Is he being first-hand or second-hand? Original or conventional? In terms that the class will understand, this set of considerations can be focussed by questions such as: "Which one of these images strikes you as the most ordinary illustration? Which one is the most unexpected and striking?" Actually, a variety of replies will be obtained showing that, more or less, the whole poem gives the impression of first-handness in language and in feeling. The "wool of the beaver" might by common consent be regarded as the most original, and the "lily" and "snow" (for whiteness) the least. There is precision and freshness in the "lily" and "snow" items, when we notice the way in which the poet refines on the commonplace generality as he refines on none of the other comparisons:

"Have you seen but the white lily grow
Before rude hands have touched it?
Have you seen but the fall of the snow
Before the soil hath smutcht it?

An alternative classification of the imagery would display the manifold nature of the world on which the poet draws for the various items. Not all poets would be capable of referring in such a small space to lilies, snow, soil, swans, beavers, bees, brier-buds, and the nard which the Elizabethans burned on their fires to scent their otherwise unsavoury chambers. How many poets writing since the age of Jonson can bring, say, eau-de-Cologne into the same context as their "nature" similes,

or carry their sensibilities home with them from the fields into the kitchen? The imagery indicates the range of the poet's sensibilities, and the easy assurance, the lack of anxiety about the impact the environment is making on the man. There is a sense of solidity and sanity and normality. The observation is fine but not finicking; the flesh that is responding is cool and unfevered for all its sensitiveness. There is physical contact but not sensuousness, and in the proportioned emphasis the suggestion of a strongly healthy mind, surely poised, not spending itself all at one time, or all in one direction, holding much in reserve. There is none of the vague localisation of impressions that is characteristic of much nineteenth-century romantic poetry, nor, on the other hand, any of that Keatsianism which seems to feel each feeling twice over.

"I sing of a Maiden" affords a delightful example of the rich image and the simple treatment. The poem is about Christ's coming to the Virgin Mother. The single image, repeated three times, each time with a slight variation, is the main factor in communicating *what it was like*. It is through this image that the best approach to the poem can be made.

The key words are "Dew in April." Everybody in the class writes down on a scrap of paper the ideas he associates with each word, and a blackboard list is drawn up:

DEW	APRIL
MORNING	SPRING
freshness	
purity	New year
tears	
grass bowing under	Beginning of life for
beads of dew	plants and flowers
refreshing	
life-bringing	Sun and showers
comes down from sky	

The two sets of associations are closely related to each other, and lend each other every assistance. (Compare the effects, for example if the words were to be changed to "Rain in July.") They admit also of almost complete transference to the idea of Christ's coming—innocence, purity, descending from heaven, life-bringing, new-creating, greeted with the bowed heads of silent adoration (or Mary leaning over the child in the manger), and (the "dew" also suggests "tears," and "April showers") even as undergoing the pain of Passion week.

The slight variations in the image as it is repeated are "dew on the *grass*," "dew on the *flower*," "dew on the *spray*." It is not essential to the success of the image that these variations should add separate additional meanings of their own. They can be justified formally and simply as variations allowing an important item to recur three times, thus retaining simplicity while achieving intensity. As it is, however, there are relevant meanings which few readers omit to notice when once attention is drawn to the central part of the pattern—meanings that come to support the main image and give it a further strength. "Grass," "flower," "spray": the sequence is certainly suggestive. That the grass should be mentioned first might indicate Christ's coming to all men, to the mass and multitude of the common people. (Walt Whitman and D. H. Lawrence both use "grass" with this kind of suggestion behind it.) Then the "Flower," and the "spray" of flowers, point to the development of something rare and beautiful and rich and self-propagating after the initial visitation to the grass.

It may be argued that these last meanings are not really interpretations of the poem so much as adventitious afterthoughts and rationalisations. That may well be. In any case, it does not matter a great deal how a reader displays to himself or to others the way in which he receives a poem, so long as he can see fairly clearly (especially in the classroom) where the demonstration of integral parts of the poem—what is required by the technique of demonstration chosen—marks itself off from the poem itself. In this poem the core of the experience is

the ecstatic intensity of the coming, and this is given in the rhythm as much as through the imagery: in the stillness and quietude that breathe round the lines—so short and stealthily moving, so cautious and soft-paced, as if the ground they moved over were really holy ground. But it is in the image that the feelings of the poem tend to focus most. And the image—repeated three times—is repeated because it will bear repetition. It is in itself a big reservoir of meanings, three times resorted to, rather than one note three times struck. If we compare it with any of Ben Jonson's images, this comes out very clearly. None of his images can be lingered over for very long: they give what they have to give and the transaction is quickly over. The rhythm also of Jonson's lines carries us easily and rapidly from one thing to another, only lingering for a stroking caress in the movement of:

"Or swan's down ever."

In "I sing of a Maiden" the opposite is the case. Instead of accumulation and extensivity, we have repetition and intensity; Jonson's imagery has a single and direct appeal straight to our senses. But the mediæval poem, while its image is from a real sensuously perceived world, does not restrict itself to this world: the dew and the flower and April and the grass have meanings that are not attached to our senses, but to thoughts, to the distillations of feelings.

A good Edwardian poem to place alongside the above is Alice Meynell's "The Shepherdess":

"She walks—the lady of my delight—
A Shepherdess of sheep;
Her flocks are thoughts, she keeps them white,
She guards them from the steep;
She feeds them on the fragrant height,
And folds them in for sleep.

She roams maternal hills and bright,
Dark valleys safe and deep;

Into that tender breast at night
 The chastest stars may peep;
 She walks—the lady of my delight—
 A Shepherdess of sheep.

She holds her little thoughts in sight,
 Though gay they run and leap;
 She is so circumspect and right;
 She has her soul to keep.
 She walks—the lady of my delight—
 A Shepherdess of sheep.

Here again the tabular method will be useful. The “image” is more extended: it is in fact two series of relations that are being placed side by side, and then relations established between the series; but if the two columns “Shepherdess—Sheep” and “Little girl—Thoughts” are worked out, the interflow of meanings between the two will be readily seen.

Henley’s “Margaritae Sorori” is a further development in “extended” images, the bringing together of two large situations—in this case the events of sunset and the approach of triumphant night with the late lark singing, which runs parallel (for part of the way) with the poet’s wishes for his own passing from the world. The tabular method will again be appropriate:

“A late lark twitters from the quiet skies;
 And from the west,
 Where the sun, his day’s work ended,
 Lingers as in content,
 There falls on the old, grey city
 An influence luminous and serene,
 A shining peace.
 The smoke ascends,
 In a rosy-and-golden haze. The spires
 Shine and are changed. In the valley
 Shadows rise. The lark sings on. The sun,
 Closing his benediction

Sinks, and the darkening air
Thrills with a sense of the triumphing Night—
Night with her train of stars
And her great gift of sleep.

So be my passing!
My task accomplished and the long day done,
My wages taken, and in my heart
Some late lark singing,
Let me be gather'd to the quiet west,
The sundown splendid and serene,
Death."

Henley's poem will also serve as a model for the poetic composition exercise, with the sunset transposed to sunrise, and the old man just about to leave life behind turned into a young boy just on the threshold of life. The columns used for analysis can be used again as aids towards synthesis.

As a last sample of these extensions from one sphere of meaning to another, with mutual interaction, all of which we have conveniently called "imagery," we would mention a poem by Edith Sitwell where, by the use of allusion, two nursery rhymes are attracted into the orbit of meaning of a poem to the full understanding of which they are essential. The poem ("A Penny Fare to Babylon") appears in an anthology for children of Junior School age. If it seems at first sight difficult, the Junior School teacher can console himself with the thought that it is not nearly so "difficult" to comprehend as the nursery rhymes colleagues will be teaching to still more tender ages.

CHAPTER V

AUXILIARIES FOR THE POETRY LESSON

It is usually assumed that the poetry lesson necessarily involves the "appreciation" of some one poem, or the "learning" of some poem. This is slightly misleading. The aim of the poetry lesson is certainly to help children to read and enjoy poems; but, as was said at the outset, this in itself is just part of a much wider activity, the training of the child as a reader. The child's insight into poems will grow as his insight into language grows—and vice versa. And because of this, some time can be spent examining general aspects of language. This examination is especially profitable in the poetry lesson, because it is there that the concern with the way in which words work is most explicit, and it is there that the more complex verbal situations will be constantly occurring. In this chapter it is proposed to indicate one or two of the general aspects of language that can usefully be examined in the poetry lesson, and one or two methods whereby these general topics can be handled with children. Lectures to the class are certainly out of the question. The basis of the successful method will have to be activities with words—if possible, play-activities. The auxiliaries for the poetry lesson will be ideal when they approximate to word-games.

The "Dictionary-game" is designed to show the difference between the word as an arbitrary label for some thing ("A rose by any other name would smell as sweet") and the word as a unique assemblage of emotional possibilities (the encrustations of its own history, its sound, its associations, the verbal company it has kept during its career, etc.). It simply consists in the children using their dictionaries to construct an accurate "translation" of the poet's words into the words given in the dictionary as equivalents. Here, for example, is Shakespeare's "Hark, hark, the lark":

"Hark, hark, the lark at Heaven's gate sings,
And Phœbus 'gins arise,
His steeds to water at those springs
On chaliced flowers that lies.
And winking marybuds begin
To ope their golden eyes
With everything that pretty is
My lady sweet, arise,
Arise, Arise."

which becomes:

"Pay attention, please! The singing-bird characterised by having a long, straight hind-claw, and rather a long bill, is uttering sounds with musical inflections at the entrance of the home of the blessed. The sun commences to pass from a lower position to a higher in order to supply drink for his spirited horses from those fountains which are in a horizontal position (or nearly so) on growths resembling communion cups.

"Plants bearing yellow flowers, opening and shutting their eyes quickly, unclothe their golden organs of sight.

"In the company of all things that are pleasing by reason of their delicacy and grace, my luscious woman of social distinction or position, get up out of bed! Get up out of bed! GET UP OUT OF BED!"

It will immediately be seen that the dictionary translation is meant to replace the paraphrase as a device for giving children a surer grip on the reading of poetry. In view of the temerity of this proposal it will be well to see what is being replaced, and what work the "translation" is meant to do.

The strangulation of the poem which often results from a traditional paraphrase is familiar to every English teacher. It is unconsciously insinuated that the "*pis aller*" of prose gives us "what the poem really means." The machinery of the poem—the imagery, rhythm, rhyme, etc.—then appears as an arbitrary,

round-about way of *saying the same thing*, a series of meaningless obstacles, "ornaments," fantastic tricks. The paraphrase usurps the place of authority which should always be retained for the poet's words and for those alone.

This danger is avoided by the "dictionary translation." In the first place it has no superficial appearance of being a help to arrive at the poem's meaning. It is itself a deliberate artefact, with none of the authority of normal prose. (The humour of its "high-falutin'" sound is an admirable disinfectant.) On the contrary, it sends one back to the poem, to examine the poet's words afresh for their *own* meanings. The subterranean, un-noticed demolition of the poem which a traditional paraphrase effects is performed openly and blatantly by the "translation"—to the enhancement of the poem's prestige. The poem is not made to seem so much self-indulgence on the part of a peculiar person who prefers the round-about to the direct. It is seen that all the machinery is essential to the living experience which the poem is, the sign of something which makes the poem alive where the translation, for lack of these things, is dead. The matter-of-fact mentality (the no-time-for-beating-about-the-bush attitude)—the chief defence mechanism against really exercising one's faculties in the strenuous act of poetic appreciation—is exorcised.

The "Dictionary-game" needs to be followed up by other devices which employ the dictionary. In the Speech-training lessons, as well as in the appreciation lessons proper, some insight into the "texture" of words as sounds will have to be given. The contrast of dictionary-translation and poem will bring out another important way in which words differ—in their associations.

Definite association-exercise is desirable in the fourteen-year-old forms, and it is work that can easily synchronise with the use of the dictionary in the poetry lesson.

Lists of words are given to the class (e.g., "flower," "summer," "dusk," "shade") and their controlled associations—the constellation of other things, feelings, thoughts, into which they fall—

are written down by the class. The reading out of the various individuals' groupings is always instructive—and also entertaining.

The association exercise will tend to develop in children a sense of the way in which words carry with them a powerful load of meaning, upon which the poet constantly relies.

Passing on from this, the general spheres of discourse can be marked out. Words tend to have currency within special definable territories, some words more than others. The scientists' vocabulary, for example, with its *-isms*, *-ologies*, *-icalities*, *-ities*, is fairly easily recognised. Then there are the differing social occasions: you would not use the same vocabulary in talking to a learned society that you would use in explaining the same subject to your family; and drawing-room words are different from the words used between friends. Vocabulary investigations, aiming at bringing out the differences between these various spheres of discourse, should be organised, and practice given in the recognition of the appropriate word, or its use: e.g. "When do you use 'small' rather than 'little'?" "when do we say 'boy' rather than 'lad'?" This most essential part of language-training is not only neglected, but is often made more difficult by the so-called vocabulary work done *via* reading-with-the-dictionary at school. The shortcoming of depending on the dictionary-lists of equivalents is that the dictionary does not tell us when to say (or write) "father" and when "male parent." And without this knowledge one is worse off with a dictionary than without one.

An extension of this investigation would include the vocabularies of the different poets, and of the different times in which they have written. "Poetic diction" is merely a certain selection of language sanctioned by a large group of poets. The language of the romantics is different from that of the eighteenth century, which differs again from the language of Shakespeare's time, or from that of the modern poet. And often the vocabulary itself is a fair indication of the interests, sensibilities, and capabilities of times and men.

It is a short step from building up association-groups of single

words to dealing with more complex word-formations, especially those peculiarly poetic ones—simile and metaphor. The taking of words apart—separating out their associations—suggests the complementary activity of bringing words together.

So rich is their latent content that any two words, if brought together, will produce between them a novel and suggestive context or meaning. The experiments of certain post-war modernists in constructing similes such as "Like an umbrella on an operating table" offer instructive examples of what might be attempted with children. Similes and metaphors follow no known logical lines of connexion. For example, we need only remember the strange conjunctions met with in the *Song of Songs*: "Thy nose is like the tower of Lebanon that looketh towards Damascus." Chance in this matter, will be as rich a creator as choice. Assemblages of words fortuitously brought together can become suddenly alive with meaning—charged with emotion or humour. "Clashes" as well as "harmonies" will stand out and fix themselves vividly. Practice with the matching-lists will acclimatise the mind to those conditions of language which result in such situations, on the utmost verges of meaning, as:

"Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time"

The practice can take two forms. In each case the basic principle is the same. Words (nouns) suggested at random by the class are put into a hat and drawn out by pairs. The words are coupled by "is" (metaphor) or by "is like" (simile). A sample list turned out such groupings as:

- | | | | | |
|---------------|---|----|---|---------------------|
| (i) The globe | — | IS | — | a kingfisher. |
| (ii) A button | — | IS | — | a chimney. |
| (iii) Grass | — | IS | — | coral. |
| (iv) A bird | — | IS | — | a pair of trousers. |
| (v) Endurance | — | IS | — | a rose. |
| (vi) A wave | — | IS | — | a dragon. |

In class the list can be worked through from beginning to end. The aim is for the class to justify (if it is at all possible) the specific coupling each phrase asserts. No. (i), for example, was readily justified by the second-year form of a secondary school; the flash of the kingfisher's bright green-blue in the sunlight was like the speeding of the earth through space, with its predominant (imaginary) blue and green of sea and grass. The "point of observation" for the image to arise at all would have to be somewhere in (mental) space, where you could conceive of the huge globe as a rapid, flashing, and transient kingfisher.

In justifying an image, what happens is that a very complex situation has to be developed into which the image fits, and in connexion with which *it makes sense*. No. (ii) is a much remoter image to deal with than No. (i); but an air-pilot's view of a chimney, or of a row of them, like black holes on the edge of a green belt, would be sufficient to make the statement intelligible. The mass ingenuity of a class will rarely be defeated, except, possibly, in the case of an example such as No. (iv).

Discrimination between successful and less successful images can be trained by a variation of the same exercise. After the class has got used to the idea of "justifying" almost any image that can be contrived, it should be led on to sorting images. Out of a long list (compiled as in the "justifying" exercises) each individual selects three that seem to him to be "good" and three that are not so good—giving the reasons for his selection in each case. This in turn can lead to the examination of images as used in important literary contexts. The actual image used by the writer is placed among a selection of other images, ranging widely in their appropriateness (or, in the sorts of contexts they would fit into); the exercise then is to find by inspection which is the writer's image, or, alternatively, to supply justifying reasons for the writer's choice. An example might be based on Tennyson's

"There is sweet music here that softer falls"

—softer falls than thistledown on an autumn day, than feathers

from a dove's breast, than snow on a lonely mere, than a cat on a velvet carpet, than soot through a thick fog, etc.

Tennyson's lines run:

"There is sweet music here that softer falls
 Than petals of blown roses on the grass,
 Or night-dews on still waters between walls
 Of shadowy granite, in a gleaming pass;
 Music that gentlier on the spirit lies
 Than tired eyelids upon tir'd eyes;
 Music that brings sweet sleep down from the blissful skies."

Exercises of this type show the many reasons why a certain image is used in preference to another; an image works in several ways, not merely in one. Any of the images substituted for Tennyson's gives some clear impression of a thing falling softly. What they do not do is perform all the rest of the work. "Petals of blown roses on the grass"—the heavy scent of sweetness and decay, the feeling of drooping languor and luxurious enervation, the dreamy leisureliness of the process as the leaves detach themselves one by one and drift vaguely to the ground—the image is a part of *The Lotus Eaters*, and *The Lotus Eaters* is a part of the image: many more factors weigh in the poet's mind as he is making his image, than are superficially implied in the comparison indicated by "softer."

This use of substituted images leads naturally to the use of "substitutions" in other directions. In the introduction to his anthology "Come Hither," Mr. de la Mare tells how, as a very small boy, he played a substitution-game of his own with poems, only to find that as soon as he replaced Old King Cole's *three* fiddlers with *five* (altering the rhymes, of course, to accommodate the new arrivals) the nursery ballad was robbed of its power over him. The replacement of key-words in a short poem by other words is a useful way of getting children to realise the importance of the poet's actual selection. Mr. Robert Graves (in "Poetic Unreason") applies the substitution-technique, with impressive success, to "How many miles to Babylon?" Why is it

that particular town rather than Philadelphia or Timbuctoo? Another good example is Blake's epigram:

"I do not love thee, Doctor Fell,
The reason why I cannot tell;
But this I'm sure I know full well—
I do not love thee, Doctor Fell."

A substitute-version of this is easy to devise:

"I do not love thee, Doctor Gray,
The reason why I cannot say;
But this to me's as clear as day—
I do not love thee, Doctor Gray."

Both versions are put before the class, without comment. Interest in the subsequent proceedings might be all the more keen if at the outset a census of opinion is taken as to the respective merits of the two poems. Investigation will quickly reveal the fact that the differences between them are all connected with the choice of the unlikeable doctor's name. The class then runs over the usual things one likes to think about a doctor: a doctor is the friend of humanity, he cures, he dispels pain, sickness, danger, and gloom; he is definitely on the side of the angels. We like to think of him as a person in whose hands we are safe, who is trusty, warm, sympathetic, kindly. Which of the two doctors (Fell or Gray) seems to have round him the most undocorish atmosphere—something that will justify the poet's suspicion and dislike?

To take "Fell" first: it suggests "fell" (from "fall"), "fell" meaning "moor," "fell" the adjective, and maybe even "felon." All these words have an aura about them antagonistic to the group of ideas associated with the usual kind of doctor. The first—besides its connexion with "hurt" and disaster—links up with Lucifer and the Fallen Angels: wrong company for any medico. The second suggests bleakness, oppressive wastes that scarcely tolerate human habitation; the third is an adjective

reserved for the sudden and rapacious and sinister, and the last a noun meaning "criminal."

There will scarcely be any need to turn to "Gray" and examine it for contrary associations—its comparative indeterminateness, its brightness even (it forces us to bring "day" into the poem, and its other rhymes are "may, gay, play"). There is no doubt about Doctor Fell's fellishness, and which name is more appropriate for an anti-doctor epigram.

There are any number of short poems which can be treated in the same way as the Blake epigram. Among the long poems the ballads (those with choruses), and those lyrics which rely on refrain words for their atmosphere, will also lend themselves to a similar treatment. The function an expressive refrain serves in a poem is never so much appreciated as when experiments are made with less expressive alternatives, or alternatives maybe quite as expressive but not so appropriate. If one letter in Morris's "Two red roses across the moon" be altered, the refrain becomes something far from romantic:

"Two red noses across the moon."

Calverley's parody of the ballad form, it will be remembered, turns largely round his refrain:

"Butter and eggs and a pound of cheese"

—a good example to hold up against:

"Jennifer, gentle, and rosemary"

or: "Troy's down,
Tall Troy's on fire."

PART II

THE DOING AND SAYING OF POEMS

CHAPTER VI

DOING BALLADS

OUT of the era of Squeers and Young Ladies' Albums two main poetry-teaching methods emerged. According to the one, teaching poetry was a matter of administering to unwilling patients grim doses of memory-work, the poetic ambrosia turned to sulphur and treacle; according to the other, Shakespeare was to be held in the right hand and a bottle of smelling salts in the left, in readiness for the rapturous "O Altitudo" and the subsequent swoon. Neither method was calculated to further a liking for poetry, or an understanding of it.

Among the pioneers of a new way of handling poetry in the classroom is Miss Marjorie Gullan, with her technique of Choral Speaking. Miss Gullan's name would have to be mentioned at the outset in any treatment of the question of "saying" poems in the classroom, though what follows here does not claim to be derived from, to replace, or to apply her methods. Many teachers will have arrived by their own devious route at "Choral Speaking," only to discover on looking round that the territory has already been explored and expertly charted.

With Miss Gullan's general thesis all teachers of poetry will agree, though their agreement may be wisely qualified. In the first and last resort poetry is a certain kind of speech. The speech is a bridge to a specific experience. The aim of the poetry lesson is to cross that bridge successfully, to achieve the reading which will give access to the proper experience. To ask what a poem means is often to ask how it should be said—and *vice versa*. This being so, it is not too much to demand that most

of the time our concern in the poetry-lesson should be with the satisfactory saying of the poet's words.

There are dangers, however, connected with choral speaking as a dominant poetry-lesson technique. One is that one's interest will be gradually deflected from the poem to the *speech*. A second is that one might make the mistake of assuming that reading and saying aloud are identical or inseparable. The last (and possibly the greatest) springs from the fact that choral speaking is so perfectly fitted to the classroom and the group that it might render the individual incapable of reading poetry outside the classroom and away from the group. But none of these dangers will be acute if it is remembered all the time that the group-speaking is merely an aid for the individual, only of use either if it has helped him to get inside the poem, or if it has actually emerged from his insight into the poem. The saying must be a pathway for each reader into the experience which really is "the poem."

For beginners the group-reading is often the best method of getting at a reading with which one can identify oneself as an individual. The incantational effect of the rhythm is amplified in choral speaking, increasing the power of the poem over those participating in the reading (and rhythm is *the* teacher in the poetry lesson); shyness is overcome (enjoyment can be more open under conditions in which one is protected from the eye and the ear of the herd); and finally—most important of all—a choir, in its own right, for certain types of poems, is a machine with a greater range of expression than a single voice. This last statement does not only apply to dramatic or narrative-dramatic poems (in which more than one person is represented as taking part), but it also applies to many lyrics: a choir-arrangement of "Full fathom five," for example, can bring out the structure of the poem much better than can a single voice.

The ballads, traditional and literary, are a good source of poems at once good in themselves, admirably adapted to the taste of children, and suitable for group-saying. There are many ballads, and not a super-abundance of poetry lessons

(about forty per year?), so an effective selection will have to be made. A dozen ballads might be enough for two years—as more than ballad poetry will have to be included at the same time in the syllabus. Assuming at least two periods for the appreciation and saying of each ballad, even a dozen ballads will take up about a third of the poetry periods.

The simplest form of ballad (from the point of view of the group-saying) consists of a narrative, or recitative, cut up by a refrain-line. Examples of these are the traditional "Binnorie" and "Lykewake Dirge," and William Morris's "Two Red Roses Across the Moon." The natural division of speaking here is to give one person the task of saying the story, while the rest of the class puts in the refrain. Here is Morris's poem:

"There was a lady, lived in a hall,
Large in the eyes, and slim and tall;
And ever she sung from noon to noon,
Two red roses across the moon.

There was a knight came riding by
In early spring, when the roads were dry;
And he heard that lady sing at the noon,
Two red roses across the moon.

Yet none the more he stopped at all,
But he rode a-gallop past the hall;
And left that lady singing at noon,
Two red roses across the moon.

Because, forsooth, the battle was set,
And the scarlet and blue had got to be met,
He rode on the spur till the next warm noon:—
Two red roses across the moon.

But the battle was scatter'd from hill to hill,
From the windmill to the watermill;
And he said to himself, as it near'd the noon,
Two red roses across the moon.

You scarce could see for the scarlet and blue,
A golden helm or a golden shoe;
So he cried, as the fight grew thick at the noon,
Two red roses across the moon!

Verily then the gold bore through
The huddled spears of the scarlet and blue;
And they cried as they cut them down at the noon,
Two red roses across the moon!

I trow he stopp'd when he rode again
By the hall, though draggled sore with the rain;
And his lips were pinch'd to kiss at the noon
Two red roses across the moon.

Under the may she stoop'd to the crown,
All was gold, there was nothing of brown;
And the horns blew up in the hall at noon,
Two red roses across the moon."

In a proper reading of the refrain-lines there should be nothing in the least boring, or monotonous, or mechanical; nor is it a speech-exercise too elementary to be undertaken. On the contrary, it is a highly delicate operation to say the refrain each time it occurs with just that slight change of tone and meaning required by the constantly changing context. The refrain-line in both the old ballads and the better modern ones that have been modelled on them, is a cunning sounding board for the feelings developing in the verses. The meaning of the verse affects the meaning of the refrain, so that every time it is repeated it must be given a new turn, fitted into the developing pattern of the poem. In "Two Red Roses," for example, the refrain lines must be said in such a way as to suggest that they are at first the sweet, distant notes of the lady's song as she walks in the garden; then they become the lilt echoing in the knight's brain, synchronising with the beat of his horse's hoofs as he gallops past the hall; then they become the eager, raucous shout taken up by the host as a battle-cry from the lips of their

leader; then a refreshing sweetness as the thought of the singer in the garden comes back to weary man after the conflict; and finally the symbol for the two wedded hearts and the rejoicing of the marriage-feast.

The class will suggest these meanings quite without prompting: they will put them into their reading. The aptness of the chorus-line as a vehicle for these meanings can be demonstrated by testing for associations. It is, in fact, too good an example of appropriateness of associations to be passed over.

The line does not work as a picture. As soon as we think of it as a picture we become aware of the contradiction involved in seeing the red silhouette of the roses against the moon. It works extremely well though as an assemblage of potent suggestions. The red roses suggest "love," and indicate something of what the lady in the garden was day-dreaming. "Across"—in the context—can suggest conflict, both the external struggle of the two parties on the battlefield, and the internal struggle in the knight's breast between love and the call of duty. The "moon" brings in romance and adventure, and gives the whole poem a kind of framework in which the realities of both love and war can be set at a misty distance. Thus the line can swing naturally from the day-dreams of the lady in the garden to the clash of battle. (The *redness* of the roses *across the moon* becomes bloodstains on a bright steel-blade.)

Of ballads with refrains, which lend themselves to similar treatment, there are a large number, and selection is an easy matter. Of our dozen or so ballads for the first two years poetry five might be of this type: in addition to "Two Red Roses"—"Binnorie," "Lykewake Dirge," "Edward," "The Twa Corbies."

From ballads of this type the next step is to the dramatic ballad. These may in some cases (e.g. "Lord Randal") have a regularly-recurring chorus; they may be plain narrative; or they may introduce into the narrative speeches by the people the story is about. The majority of ballads are of this mixed type: "The Gay Goshawk," "The Cruel Brother," "Sir Patrick Spens," "The Wife of Usher's Well," "Blancheflour and

Jellyflorice," "Tam Lin," Hogg's "Lock the door, Lariston," Rossetti's "Sister Helen" (done in a cut version which reduces it to a convenient classroom size), Morris's "My Father's Close" and "John of Tours."

These ballads can be treated in a variety of ways. "Lock the Door, Lariston" is a splendid ballad for direct saying. "The Gay Goshawk," on the other hand, might be read out aloud by the teacher alone, with a view to the class doing some written work upon it. It should be left to each poem to dictate the method of handling it. There is no rule of thumb to go by, and no law to insist on group-saying in every case. Group-saying is not an end in itself, but only the means to an end.

The saying of a ballad often entails the working out of a "score" on the part of the choir. The "score" is the poem written out (or cyclostyled) with the various speaking parts and the appropriate expressions indicated. To take Hogg's poem, for example: two sections are needed in the choir, one to take the dramatic parts and the other to take the narrative. We might call the two sections "A" and "B". The "A" section is the body of Scots who are fleeing before the approach of the English army. From the "A" section six individual voices have to be selected for Jock Elliot's men, and in addition there will have to be Jock Elliot himself. Jock Elliot stands on a chair facing the class, and immediately in front of him the six single speakers. Immediately behind these (occupying the front desks) is the rest of the "A" chorus. The "B" chorus (numbering half the class) is seated in the background. The score of the poem—an eminently enjoyable one in the classroom—is as follows:

A-CHORUS	Lock the door, Lariston, lion of Liddesdale,
6	Lock the door, Lariston, Lowther comes on;
INDIVIDUAL	The Armstrongs are flying,
VOICES	The widows are crying,
	The Castletown's burning, and Oliver's gone.

A-CHORUS Lock the door, Lariston—high on the weather-
gleam

See how the Saxon plumes bob in the sky!

6 Yeoman, and carbineer,
INDIVIDUAL Billman, and halberdier,
VOICES Fierce is the foray, and far is the cry!

6 Bewcastle is brandishing high his broad scimitar,
INDIVIDUAL Ridley is riding his fleet-footed grey;
VOICES Hedley and Howard there,
Wandale and Windermere;—

A-CHORUS Lock the door, Lariston, hold them at bay!

6 Why dost thou smile, noble Elliot of Lariston?
INDIVIDUAL Why does the joy-candle gleam in thine eye?
VOICES Thou bold border-ranger
Beware of thy danger,
Thy foes are relentless, determined, and nigh!

NARRATOR Jock Elliot raised up his steel bonnet and lookit,
His hand grasped the sword with a nervous embrace:

JOCK ELLIOT "Ah, welcome, brave foemen,
On earth there are no men
More gallant to meet in the foray or chase!

"Little know you of the hearts I have hidden here,
Little know you of the moss-troopers' might—

6 Linhope, and Sorbie true,
INDIVIDUAL Sundhope, and Milburn too,
VOICES Gentle in manners, but lions in fight!

6 "I have Mangerton, Ogilvie, Raeburn, and
INDIVIDUAL Netherbie,

VOICES Old Sim of Whitram, and all his array;

A-CHORUS Come all Northumberland,
Teesdale and Cumberland,
Here at the Breaken Tower end shall the fray!"

(PAUSE.)

B-CHORUS Scowled the broad sun on the links of green
Liddesdale,

Red as a beacon-light tipped he the wold;
Many a brave martial eye
Mirrored the morning sky
Never more looked on its orbit of gold.

Shrill was the bugle's note, dreadful the warrior's
shout,

Lancers and halberds in splinters were borne;
Helmet and Hauberk then
Braved the claymore in vain,
Buckler and armlet in shivers were shorn.

See how thy wane, the proud files of the Winder-
mere!

Howard! ah woe to thy hopes of the day!
Hear the wide welkin rend,
While the Scots' shouts ascend—

A-CHORUS "Elliot of Lariston, Elliot for aye!"

The technique of speech in the saying of these ballads is quite straightforward. Miss Gullan sometimes advises a combination of rhythmic movements with the speaking: but this recommendation is more for very Junior work and Infants. Children in the senior school will be less likely to feel the need for expressing the dance of the words through rhythmic movements of hand or arm. The movement in the words themselves will be sufficient to provide the impetus for speech. What must be concentrated on is—accuracy of attack, where the combined choir is speaking, variation of speed, and variation of volume; where the line is split up among one or two speakers, there must never be any jerkiness in the handing over and the receiving of the line's proper rhythm from one speaker to another.

The important thing in taking group-saying with senior classes is to see that the way in which the speaking is arranged

does illuminate the poem, shed light on its internal structure. Unless the score does this, speaking the poem will be worse than not reading it at all, and the saying will not integrate the individual readings so much as blight them.

Not all the ballads lend themselves to group-sayings, and where this is the case other modes of handling them will be necessary. "Tam Lin," for example, might be turned into a drama; "Lord Thomas and Fair Annet" (a splendid example of ballad-writing at its best) might be examined and discussed, or read and mimed. To make a fetish of choral speaking in the classroom, or to pass over good material because it does not adapt itself to this particular method, would be silly.

Sometimes, however, the opposite is the case: an opportunity to *do* or to *say* a ballad is missed because it is felt that the ballad is too long or too complicated for the children ever to get it off quickly enough to do it in a reasonable time. The teacher might be convinced that only by getting the class to say and do them can the ballads be properly handled in the classroom; yet at the same time saying and doing might appear to involve so much work, that before anything like an adequate saying of the ballad is arrived at all spontaneity and interest have vanished. The answer to these doubts is, that children can learn more and more quickly than we often suppose; that in doing ballads there is no need to make accuracy of memory your aim; and that elaborate staging is never required unless the performance is a "speech-day" one.

Here is a ballad, for example, which was done in a normal classroom, and done four or five times in a forty-minute period. It is familiar enough to be found in most anthologies, but none the worse for that:

Sir Patrick Spens.

THE KING. The King sits in Dunfermline town
 Drinking the blude-red wine;
 O where will I get a skeely skipper
 To sail this new ship o' mine?

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NARRATOR. O up and spake an eldern knight,
Who sat at the king's right knee—

LORD. Sir Patrick Spens is the best sailor
That ever sailed the sea.

KING (*writing letter with huge flourishes in the air, and sealing it with a ponderous fist*).

Oh, I will write a braid letter
And seal it with my hand,
And send it to Sir Patrick Spens
Who's walking on the strand.

MESSENGER (*who has taken three paces up to Sir Patrick during the last line of the King's speech*).

To Norroway, to Norroway,
To Norroway o'er the foam.
The king's daughter of Norroway
'Tis thou maun bring her home.

NARRATOR. The first word that Sir Patrick read
Sae loud, loud laughéd he;
(*Sir Patrick does so*).
The next word that Sir Patrick read
(*Sir Patrick stops and starts*).
The tear blinded his e'e.
(*Sir Patrick takes out his handkerchief*).

SIR PATRICK (*angrily*).

O who is this has done this deed
And told the King o' me?
To send us out at this time o' year
To sail upon the sea.
(*Sir Patrick turns to his gallant crew*).
Be it wind, be it wet, be it hail, be it sleet,
Our ship must sail the foam;
The King's daughter of Norroway
'Tis we must fetch her home.

NARRATOR (*the gallant crew hoist sails during the first line and rock rhythmically backwards and forwards during the second and third lines, and stand out in their files facing across the classroom to where, in the next file but one, the "lords of Norroway" are seated*).

They hoisted their sails on Monday morn,
With all the speed they may,
And they have landed in Norroway
Upon a Wodensday.

They hadna been a week, a week,
In Norroway but twae,
When that the lords of Norroway
Began aloud to say:

NORWAY LORDS.

Ye Scottish men spend our kinges gold,
And all our queenies fee!

CREW.

Ye lie, ye lie, ye liars loud,
Full loud we hear ye lie!

SIR PATRICK (*the crew has seated itself in high dudgeon*).

Make ready, make ready, my merry men a',
Our gude ship sails the morn.

SAILOR.

Now ever alack, my master dear,
I fear a deadly storm.

I saw the new moon late yestreen
Wi' the old moon in her arm,
And if we go to sea, master,
I fear we'll come to harm.

NARRATOR (*during the second verse of the Narrator's speech those of the class who are not in the ship make fitting storm noises*).

They hadna sailed a league, a league,
A league but barely three,
When the lift grew dark, and the wind blew loud
And gurly grew the sea.

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The anchors brak, and the top masts lap,
 It was sic a deadly storm;
 And the waves came o'er the broken ship
 Till all her sides were torn.

SIR PATRICK (*he rocks from side to side with his hand on the helm and his crew do likewise*).

O where will I get a gude sailor,
 To take my helm in hand
 Till I get up to the tall top mast,
 To see if I can spy land?

SECOND SAILOR. O here am I, a sailor gude,
 To take the helm in hand,
 Till you go to the tall top mast;
 But I fear you'll ne'er spy land.

NARRATOR (*the sailor at the helm continues to rock, and the crew with him. The background noises of the sea and wind grow louder*).

He hadna gane a step, a step,
 A step but barely ane,
 When a bolt flew out of our gudely ship
 And the salt sea it came in.

SIR PATRICK. Go fetch a web o' the silken cloth,
 Another o' the twine,
 And warp them into our ship's side,
 And letnae the sea come in.

NARRATOR (*the Scottish lords who file next to the crew, get up during the second verse, walk up and down the aisle in a finical manner on tiptoe, and are washed overboard back into their seats on the last line of the verse*).

They fetched a web o' the silken cloth,
 Another o' the twine,
 They warped them round that gude ship's side,
 But still the sea came in.

O loth, loth were our gude Scots lords
 To wet their cork-heeled shoon!
 But long or a' the play was played
 They wet their hats aboon!

And mony was the feather bed
 That fluttered on the foam,
 And mony was the gude lord's son
 That never mair cam' home.

*(The ladies and maidens sit in the files on the side of the class
 farthest away from the ship. They must suit their actions to the
 Narrator's words).*

The ladies wrang their fingers white,
 The maidens tore their hair,
 All for the sake of their true loves.
 For them they'll see nae mair.

THE LADIES. O lang, lang may we ladies sit
 Wi' our fans into our hands.
 Before we see Sir Patrick Spens
 Come sailing to the strand.

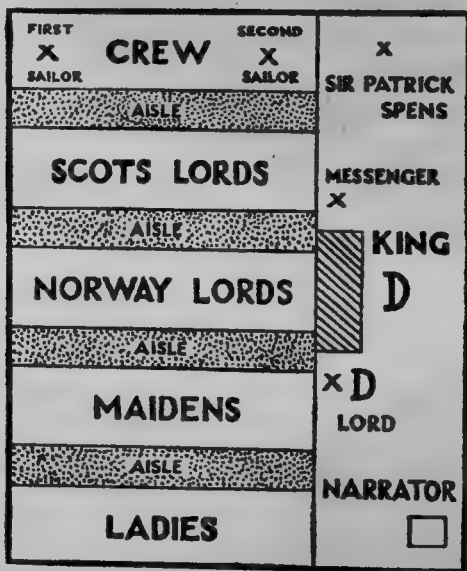
THE MAIDENS. And lang, lang may we maidens sit
 Wi' our gold combs in our hair,
 Awaiting for our own dear loves,
 For them we'll see nae mair.

ALL CLASS (*most mournfully*).

Half ower, half ower to Aberdour,
 'Tis fifty fathom deep,
 And there lies gude Sir Patrick Spens
 Wi' the Scots lords at his feet.

The placing of the various actors is as follows. The King can
 be placed out on the front of the class, with the messenger and

the Lord on either side. To give him the necessary importance he may perch on the back of a chair. The Narrator is best well out of the way of everything else, standing on a chair in one corner of the room. The Narrator is the only one who has a script. His voice must be clear, dramatic and compelling: he has to give the actors their lead, rhythmically, when it comes to their accompanying the words he is speaking with appropriate actions. The arrangement of the rest of the *dramatis personæ*, according to ordinary classroom convenience, is best indicated in a diagram.



The only thing that is needed to ensure that the ballad will be successfully said and done two or three times within half an hour is quick memories, assisted where these fail with bold inventive substitutions. The poem is not read through from beginning to end by the teacher first. He begins to read the King's speech, and then asks who can say the King's lines. There may be no

response at first, so the verse is read through again, and the second time there will always be someone who has it by heart—more or less. Small verbal variations are not bothered about, as in the best ballad tradition: the King can drink “ruby” wine if that is preferred to “blude-red” wine. Out-of-the-way phrases may be assimilated unconsciously to the everyday—“lift” becoming “sky,” “gurly” changing to “burly,” and “the morn” turning out as “at dawn.” These, and even more extensive alterations, are by the way. The main thing is that the verses shall be quickly memorised. The aural and other mistakes will serve later to illustrate how the ballads have changed in being handed on from one speaker to another. As soon as it is seen that the good memoriser qualifies for a part in the play there will be no lack of keenness. Small slips of paper might be given out on which the actors can jot down hasty notes of their parts, their cues, and anything else that they might think helpful. The poem is gone through once, and at the end of this reading the actors know what they have to do, and proceed to their performance. Needless to say the first performance will not be perfect—but it will be interesting enough to call for others, successively nearer perfection.

A full term's work on Ballads can easily be done, without any two lessons being alike—either in method of approach or subject-matter. The Ballads fall naturally into five or six groups:

(a) Love-themes.

- i. Tragic Love: *Binnorie*
Lord Thomas and Fair Annet
- ii. Happy-ending Love: *The Gay Goshawk*
Hynd Horn
- iii. Fairy Lover: *The Demon Lover*
The Mermaid
Tam Lin

(b) Heroic Battle:

- The Ballad of Otterburn*
Chevy Chase

- (c) Deeds of Violence or Daring, with some local hero or incident as their theme:

Hugh of Lincoln

Lamkin

Edom o' Gordon

Jock o' the Side

The Robin Hood cycle

Sir Eglamour

Sir Patrick Spens

- (d) Magic:

The Two Magicians

The Wee Wee Man

The Wife of Usher's Well

- (e) Humorous:

The Cooper o' Fife

Get up and bar the door

A dozen lessons might be made as follows:

1. *Binnorie*.—Group saying, Narrator and chorus.
2. *Sir Eglamour*.—Classroom Mime.
3. *Sir Patrick Spens*.—Saying and Doing the ballad.
4. *Blancheflour and Jellyflourice*.—Mime: with "staging" and full mime technique.
5. *Lord Thomas and Fair Annet*.—Teacher's reading and exposition.
6. *Tam Lin*.—Reading, and re-enacting: free dramatisation.
7. Silent reading of any, or any number of ballads. (For subsequent oral or written composition work.)
8. Class Symposium.—Individual Readings, telling of ballad stories, appreciations of small sections, descriptions of favourite characters, etc.
9. *The Wife of Usher's Well*.—Narrator, "silent" dramatisation (not quite mime) and speech.
10. *The Battle of Otterburn*.—Class reading and discussion.
11. Singing of some of the ballads to their tunes.
12. Concert.—Individual recitations, readings, songs, group mimes, etc.

The best of the traditional ballads are much better as poems

than the literary ballads composed in the nineteenth century. It is for this reason that they should predominate in the lists of ballads to be done in class. (Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner" is an exception, but then it is not so much a literary ballad as a living piece of Coleridge.) The traditional ballad has speed and a sense of direction that is not always found in the "story-poems" modelled on it. Passion is balanced by shrewdness, and feeling promptly issues in action. The writer and his audience share a world of clean-cut values: both have a security and solidity and stability which has not been reproduced in literature or life during any period since the Middle Ages. The tragic heroes and heroines may be involved in "romantic" circumstances, but their tragedy always springs from the clash of forces actually operative in a real contemporary situation. (Think, for example, of the sordid *mariage de convenance* that has been arranged in "Binnorie" between the knight and the eldest daughter, and of the economic drive that accounts for the elder sister's becoming a murderess.) There is always psychological realism, essential literal truth to a certain sum of facts, at the core of the most "romantic" ballad. This sense of reality goes with a powerful use of understatement, and with the manipulation of the language of everyday life for the ballad's richest effects; the language takes its life and force from the situation, not *vice versa*. Yet at the same time there is the accompaniment of convention, and ballad-decorum—naïvely displaying itself, because in the open poetry of the folk, art does not lie in concealing so much as in overtly revealing itself. The securely sane, shrewd, passionate, ballad can take up into its flexible pattern the eerie, the impossible, or the marvellous: it is, at its best, a thing of rich contrasts and deft transitions—something wider and more inclusive than anything Scott, Hogg, Morris, Rossetti, Swinburne, or Kipling could ever achieve.

As an instance of the traditional ballad at its best we might quote "The Wife of Usher's Well":

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THE WIFE OF USHER'S WELL

Characters: The Wife, Three Sons, Messenger, Narrator.

(At the beginning of the poem the Wife is sitting in her chair knitting).

NARRATOR. There lived a wife at Usher's Well,
 And a wealthy wife was she;
 She had three stout and stalwart sons
 And sent them o'er the sea.

(Messenger enters, gives message and retires. Wife reads, sighs, and sits musing, as the narrative goes on. The Messenger makes two appearances. The second letter causes the Wife to rise from her chair before she speaks).

They had not been a week from her,
 A week but barely ane,
 When word came to the carline wife
 That her three sons were gane.

They had not been a week from her,
 A week but barely three,
 When word came to the carline wife
 That her sons she'd never see.

WIFE *(bitterly and with steady, controlled passion).*

"I wish the wind may never cease,
 Nor fishes in the flood,
 Till my three sons come back to me
 In earthly flesh and blood!"

(She falls back into chair, and sits sobbing. There is a pause, then enter the ghosts of the three sons, very slowly and silently. They draw near to the Wife, who has been sitting with bent head).

NARRATOR. It fell about the Martinmas,
 When nights are lang and mirk,
 The carline wife's three sons came hame,
 And their hats were o' the birk.

It neither grew in syke nor ditch,
Nor yet in any sheugh,
But at the gates o' Paradise
That birk grew fair eneugh.

(The Wife lifts her head and starts in surprise—then runs to the right of the stage, speaks excitedly, and so back to her sons).

WIFE. "Blow up the fire, my maidens,
Bring water from the well,
For all my house shall feast this night
Since my three sons are well!"

(The Wife leads her sons to the big bed prepared for the sons on the floor, covers them with a blanket, moves her chair to the bedside, and sits down to watch over them. Her head droops, and she is soon asleep).

NARRATOR. And she has made to them a bed,
She's made it large and wide,
She's ta'en her mantle her about,
Sat down at the bedside.

(There is another pause: the crowing of cocks is heard).

Then up and crew the red, red cock,
And up and crew the grey:
The eldest to the youngest said,

1 BROTHER. " 'Tis time we were away!"

NARRATOR. The cock he had not crowed but once,
And clapped his wings at a',
When the youngest to the eldest said,

2 BROTHER. "Brother, we must awa'!"

1 & 2 BROTHERS.

"The cock doth craw, the day doth daw,
The channerin' worm doth chide;
'Gin we be missed out of our place,
A sair pain we must bide."

3 BROTHER (*the others have got up, but he is unwilling to go*).

"Lie still, lie still, but a little wee while,

Lie still yet if we may:

'Gin my mother should miss us when she wakes,

She will go mad e'er day."

(*But the others insist. They all three tiptoe past the mother's chair, staying at the door to say farewell*).

2 BROTHER. "Fare ye well, my mother dear!"

3 BROTHER. "Farewell to barn and byre!"

1 BROTHER. "And fare ye well, the bonny lass
That kindles my mother's fire!"

CHAPTER VII

SAYING LYRICS

AMONG the less pretentious of the definitions of poetry there is one which runs: "Poetry is memorable speech." Caution is needed against acting too literally on the implications of this dictum, especially for teachers who tend to the belief that poetry should be approached mainly through *sayings* of one sort or another. It is not true that no poetry which is not better said than read is really poetry, yet this is often assumed to be what the statement about "memorable speech" suggests. There are portions of poetry—of the very greatest poetry—which cannot be adequately spoken, which are much better read than said. Paradoxically enough, Shakespeare—who wrote exclusively for speakers—abounds in them:

"I will o'ertake thee, Cleopatra, and
Weep for my pardon. So it must be, for now
All length is torture. Since the torch is out,
Lie down, and stray no farther. Now all labour
Mars what it does; yea, very force entangles
Itself with strength. Seal, then, and all is done."

The difficulty of speech-occasions like the above is that there is such a large number of "tones" or "voices" possible; each one gives some part of the total meaning which invests the words, but to isolate any single one as *the* saying is to do violence to the full meaning carried by the lines. To read the lines is to feel the total chorus of voices and different sayings elaborately harmonised within the mind. Silent reading here has an obvious advantage over the most sensitive vocal rendering. There are melodies that were meant to be heard, but there are also those which

"Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone."

It is important that this should be stressed, for then the teacher will be able to embark upon his handling of the saying of lyrics with a surer realisation of what can be profitably said, and what is better left for some other sort of treatment. For all practical purposes we might say that the poetry which the teacher takes in the classroom will be that type of poetry which can with the greatest advantage be said. Silent reading—thirty or forty individuals all ruminating over ten lines of Shakespeare, pondering, pausing, saying them this way and then saying them that way (but to themselves all the time), getting the full savour of the passage—that is the ideal aimed at, and one which few teachers will have been blessed enough to realise. In general the path to that ideal end, to the sort of silent reading Antony's speech requires, consists in saying properly those poems which can be said. Hearable melodies must be the prelude to those more intricate ditties which even the human vocal organs are too clumsy to interpret.

To get the best results from a lesson which is going to end in the saying of a lyric, care must be taken to see that the poem is comprehended and appreciated before the saying is undertaken. ("Expression" in reading is the communication of the full *meaning* of a passage.) There will be the teacher's reading, followed by the class's silent reading; from this, discussion of points needing explanation might arise; and

finally the settling of the question—"How are we going to say it?"

Constructing the satisfactory score for the lyric is the climax of the lesson. One thing above all must be insisted upon. The score should be the direct outworking of the appreciation, of the way the poem is put together, and of the way its meaning is developed. Any suggestion that the saying is a mechanical supererogatory ritual, divorced from the poem's meaning, and bearing no relation to anything that has gone before in the lesson, will be fatal. The most intimate relations must be established between the appreciation and the score, so that in the final outcome it will seem inconceivable that the two can have existed apart—the original insights providing clues to the saying, the saying enriching the original insights. The saying must serve a functional purpose. And this being so, there is no reason why the sayings should become mechanical, stale repetitions of a fixed type. Each poem has its own individual structure, and the sayings should be as distinct and various as the poems.

The arrangement of the choir will reflect the varying requirements of the different poems. Sometimes it will be a unified body speaking as one group person. At other times it will be divided into groups, each with some special function. Yet again, there might be an occasional need for individual voices, solo parts to weave in and out of the choral background.

"Orpheus with his lute," and Jonson's "Tears," call for a unison rendering throughout. In the following score, capitals indicate special eminence or deliberateness of stress, and italics less eminent stress. Where words are hyphenated the rhythm is flowing and slightly quickened: absence of hyphens indicates slower rhythm and a slightly staccato separateness of the words:

ORPHEUS / with-his-lute / made TREES /
And-the MOUN-TAIN TOPS that freeze /
Bow-themselves / when HE did sing /

To-his-music-plants- and-flowers
 EVER *spring* / as sun and showers
 There had made / a LAST-ing SPRING.

Ev'rything-that-heard-him-play /
Ev'n-the-billows of-the-sea /
Hung their heads / and then lay-by /
 In *sweet* MUSIC / is such *art* /
 KILL-ing CARE / and-GRIEF / of HEART /
Fall-asleep / or hearing / die.

The rôle of the conductor is a very important one in choral renderings. He must keep the choir together, and help it to adequate expressiveness. He does not "beat time" (though his conducting will have to see that the rhythm of the piece is retained throughout); his movements of hand and arm and body are unmechanical, half-miming indications of volume and inflexion and tone of voice. Ideally he should feel that he is a puppet animated by the "voice" of the choir; the choir, conversely, should feel that their voices are flowing into the animated body that stands before them, interpreting in sound what he is interpreting through gesture.

Jonson's poem is as follows:

"Slow, slow, fresh fount, keep time with my salt tears;
 Yet, slower, yet; O faintly, gentle springs!
 List to the heavy part the music bears,
 Woe weeps out her division when she sings.
 Droop herbs and flowers;
 Fall grief in showers;
 Our beauties are not ours:
 O, I could still,
 Like melting snow upon some craggy hill,
 Drop, drop, drop, drop,
 Since Nature's pride is now a withered daffodil."

Shakespeare's "Full fathom five" is extremely impressive when said by a group, and is a good illustration of "functional"

arrangement of the choir. It will be remembered that on examination it was found to be not the simple "Sea-dirge" of Palgrave's classification, but a subtly manipulated "resurrection" poem. Beginning with the heavy, sullen swing of masses of water after a storm, the slow measure of ceremonial funerals, a sombre mood adjusted to that of Ferdinand himself, the bereaved prince thinking of his father's death-by-drowning, it moves to a final gamesomeness, a lighter mood in which the burden of pain has been lifted and through which a call can be made to the listener to venture on a new kind of experience—something reminiscent of a boyish quest.

A very simple form of rendering may be adopted. The class is divided into three groups, A, B and C. The lightest voices are in C, B is mixed, and A has the heaviest voices. The whole choir begins the poem. At the end of the third line the A group drops out, and at the end of the sixth B does likewise. A and B put in the bell-notes. Here is the score:

- | | |
|--------|---|
| A.B.C. | Full fathom five thy father lies;
Of his bones are coral made;
Those are pearls that were his eyes; |
| B.C. | Nothing of him that doth fade
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange. |
| C. | Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell, |
| A.B. | (Ding, dong) |
| C. | Hark! now I hear them— |
| A.B. | Ding, dong, bell! |

This, of course, is not the only way in which the poem can be said. So long as the internal structure of the poem is clearly realised and it is seen that one mood is replaced by another in the space of the eight lines, and so long as the rendering brings this out, it will not matter much what form the "functional"

saying takes. The above score assumes fairly large groups of up to a dozen speakers. If single speakers should be preferred a good form for the rendering to take might be as follows:

Line 1. A heavy mournful voice, dwelling on the death.

Line 2. A different voice, almost whispering—like the sea—tense with the wonder and the promise of the miraculous metamorphosis.

Line 3. This voice is joined by a companion. The line runs deep and steady.

Line 4. The speaker is still tense and whispering, but a new suggestion is allowed to creep in—a kind of half-frightened doubt that still dwells on the suffering and pain:

“Nothing of him that doth fade
But doth suffer . . .”

Line 5. The doubt is smoothed over immediately by the deeper, steadier voice—“a sea-change,” lingering over the rich stable sound of the phrase.

Line 6. Uttered by the second voice—a thrilling staccato triumph ending on “rich!”, with the third voice coming in again to give body and length to “and strange.”

Lines 7 and 8.

Airily and sweetly, with wonder and enchantment:

Let the cue for the saying of the lyric be taken from the words of the play—

“This isle is full of noises,
Sounds and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not.”

Equally excellent as a poem lending itself to the group-saying technique is Thomas Nash's “Spring.” After the reading by the teacher, and the class's silent reading, discussion might turn on the poem's rhythm—its elastic swing, swift and yet not rushing, as precise as a succession of leaps from one stepping-stone to another. The verses are divided into six short half-lines ending on the same rhyming-sound. Everything is

being made as easy as possible. The repeated rhyming-sound (cf. a bird's song) reinforces the impression of complete naïveté and lack of elaboration. The poem is devoid of any straining to be clever, and the rhymes underline this. They reveal a childlike joy in sheer repetition, while emphasising also the effortlessness of the sustained achievement.

The sentence-structure betrays the same bold rejection of the complicated. Each phrase is as simple as a sentence from a child's copy-book.

The class, isolating the adjectives the poet uses, finds them to be few in number and quite inconspicuous: "sweet," "pleasant," "gay," "merry." They do not call attention to themselves. They neither gesticulate to attract our notice, nor pose for our inspection. They are not extraordinary. The poet is not coming forward with a rare feeling or with a rare way of looking at things. There is nothing to suggest preciousness, nothing to make you linger, to dam up feeling, to arrest the keen striding pace of the lines.

The phrases from which each verse is built up are not bound together or internally related to each other in any way. They could be re-arranged, re-shuffled, and no serious disorder would ensue. Each phrase is isolated like a stepping-stone, and the absence of inter-connexion helps the light runningness of the poem, its elastic spring, the swiftness which must never become a slovenly rush or scamper or scramble.

What sort of facts are strung together? What sorts of feelings are aroused? The answers are fairly obvious. The keynote is relief, release of unhesitating energy; all care, embarrassment, restriction, frustration, and crampedness are flung off.

The chorus of bird-notes serves an important purpose in the poem. In the first place they are the only connecting link between the groups of otherwise scattered observations, binding them together, and giving them a pattern which they would not make by themselves. More important than that, they break in on the poet's voice and supplant it so naturally as to suggest that the song does not belong to a person but to a

congregation of creatures—people in society, birds in woods, animals in fields—all of whom are the beneficiaries of spring. The poet is in perfect equation with the rest of men and with his surroundings. He can efface himself with the right kind of unselfconsciousness, without ever losing his own identity, without ever escaping, without ever suggesting that there is any disharmony in man, or in the relations between man and nature. (This is the distinctive feature of the poem which marks it off from the suburbanite, romantic, or sentimentalist “nature” poetry.)

As an instance of this, take the phrase “The fields breathe sweet.” There are here two ideas which the poet (deliberately or not, it does not matter: though lack of conscious intent would be more in keeping with the poem)—leaves undifferentiated: (a) “The fields *smell* sweet” (b) “The fields breathe out and in the same air as I do; they must enjoy the fragrance of their own breath as much as I enjoy it; the sweetness exhaled by the flowers I inhale.” It is as if the poet’s existence were indistinguishable from theirs: his enjoyment certainly is.

For a class saying of “Spring” the choir can be divided into four teams, each with a team-leader. The teams say one half-line each, in rotation, as a rule. The leaders are responsible for the bird-notes. This division and dispersion emphasises the structure of the poem. The bird-notes cannot very well be said: they are better mimicked. Two of the birds (say, the nightingale and the owl) have deep voices, and the other two are light. Here is the score:

<i>ALL:</i>	Spring
<i>Single Voice:</i>	the sweet Spring!
<i>ALL:</i>	is the year’s pleasant king.
A:	Then blooms each thing
B:	Then maids dance in a ring
C:	Cold doth not sting
D:	The pretty birds do sing
<i>Leaders:</i>	Cuckoo! jug-jug! pu-we! to-witta-woo!

A: The palm and may

A, B: Make country houses gay

A,B,C: Lambs frisk and play

A,B,C,D: The shepherds pipe all day
And we hear aye

Birds tune this merry lay

Leaders: Cuckoo! jug-jug! pu-we! to-witta-woo!

A: The fields breathe sweet

B: The daisies kiss our feet

C: Young lovers meet

D: Old wives sunning sit

ALL: In every street

These tunes our ears do meet

Leaders: Cuckoo! jug-jug! pu-we! to-witta-woo!

ALL: Spring!

Single Voice: the sweet Spring!

An opportunity for sustained dignity, in the expressing of grief that is restrained and ceremonial, is given by Gascoigne's (?) "Funerall Song Lamenting Syr Philip Sidney." The outcome of an eclectic Elizabethan movement which aimed at reforming English versification on the lines of the classical languages, it remains a magnificent metrical achievement.

Two ways of rendering it might be attempted. One will be simple and direct, the whole choir speaking in unison, bringing out the direct, simple grief. The other might be more elaborate, emphasising the stately and elaborate ritualism, the academic strictness and artifice of pattern.

"Come to me, grief, for ever;

Come to me, tears, day and night;

Come to me, plaint, ah, helpless;

Just grief, heart tears, plaint worthy!

Go from me, dread to die now;

Go from me, care to live more;

Go from me, joy all on earth;

Sidney, O Sidney, is dead!

He whom the court adorned;
He whom the country courtesied;
He who made happy his friends;
He that did good to all men!

Sidney the hope of land strange;
Sidney the flower of England;
Sidney the spirit heroic;
 Sidney is dead, O dead!

Come to me, grief, for ever;
Come to me, tears, day and night;
Come to me, plaint, ah, helpless;
Just grief, heart tears, plaint worthy!"

Humorous effects are also possible. In Dean Swift's "Gentle Echo" the echo can fittingly be a roar from combined voices replying to the lover's diffident queries:

'Echo, I ween, will in the woods reply,
 And quaintly answer questions, Shall I try?
 TRY.
 How shall I please her who ne'er loved before?
 BEFORE.
 What moves women when we them address?
 A DRESS.
 If music softens rocks, love tunes my lyre,
 LIAR.
 Then teach me, Echo, how I shall come by her.
 BUY HER.
 And what can glad me when she's laid on bier?
 BEER.
 What must I do when women will be kind?
 BE KIND.
 What must I do when women shall be cross?
 BE CROSS.
 Lord, what is she that can so turn and wind?
 WIND.

APPROACH TO POETRY

If she be wind, what stills her when she blows?

BLOWS.

But if she bang again, still should I bang her?

BANG HER.

Is there no way to moderate her anger?

HANG HER.

Thanks, Gentle Echo! Right thy answers tell

What woman is and how to guard her well."

GUARD HER WELL.

All the lyrics we have looked at so far for group-saying—with the exception of Swift's—have been Elizabethan. Modern poetry also presents a fair body of writing suitable for choral speaking. The plays of Mr. T. S. Eliot and of Mr. W. H. Auden have long choruses, parts of which might be taken in the senior forms. Vachel-Lindsay also wrote with a choral rendering in view, and his "Congo," "The Daniel Jazz," and "Firemen's Ball" are both vigorous and amusing. Hardy's "Weathers" lends itself admirably, and is to be met with in the anthologies:

"This is the weather the cuckoo likes,

And so do I;

When showers betumble the chestnut spikes

And nestlings fly:

And the little brown nightingale bills his best,

And they sit outside of the 'Travellers' Rest,'

And maids come forth sprig-muslin drest,

And citizens dream of the south and west,

And so do I.

This is the weather the shepherd shuns,

And so do I;

When beeches drip in browns and duns,

And thresh and ply;

And hill-hid tides throb throe on throe,
And meadow rivulets over-flow,
And drops on gate-bars hang in a row,
And rooks in families homeward go,
And so do I."

The "Poet" says the line "And so do I." The other lines are distributed among various groups (a-line-a-group).

The poem is a contrast, built up from concrete details, in mood and tone. The second verse dwells on rain and storm, the first verse depends on sun and the windless calms of summer for its chestnut blossom, the young nightingale's song, the citizens at their doors in the dreamy heat, the young girls flaunting in their filmiest dresses, and for the customers of the "Travellers' Rest" who refresh themselves sitting on the benches outside the inn. In the favourable circumstances of the first verse people can relax and expand securely. In the second verse there is a significant absence of human beings: a hostile world has banished them from its landscape, as we are made to feel it will banish them from the earth. One of the "oblique" suggestions in the poem (to borrow the terminology of Dr. Tillyard) is definitely the contrast between the universe as supporting human life for a brief span, and the universe as being ultimately anti-human. Hardy's pessimism occupies a central place in the experience. The "little brown nightingale" and the "cuckoo"—the traditional good omen, the bringer of luck, who

" . . . sucketh the white flower
For to keep her voice clear,
And the more she singeth cuckoo
The summer draweth near"

—are replaced in the second verse by the "rooks". These are a vivid contrast to the cuckoo and nightingale. They are flying homeward under gathering dusk, *in families*. More than the merely natural phenomenon of the rooks' flock-instinct seems

implied in that heavily sympathetic phrase. It is as if they are mustering about them the last and most pathetic consolation of adversity—the company of those who have a share in the affliction. The nestlings in Verse 1, on the other hand, are leaving the family, plunging for the first time as venturesome individuals into a life of their own. The nightingale (in this case the bird of single-handed gallantry, not the heart-broken songster leaning on the thorn) and the cuckoo (mocking flautist and harbinger of summer) emphasise the contrast to the sombre, melancholy families of the rooks. The only showers in the first verse are those that “betumble the chestnut spikes”: the very showers are mingled with petals falling through the branches of the sheltering tree. Verse 2 is sodden with rain, and for the chestnut lit up with the lanterns of its own blossom we have the dripping beech, brown and dun, in a violent agony of self-injuring agitation.

The contrast reveals itself equally in the sounds of the words and their movement. The rhymes of the first verse are sharp, vivacious, stimulating—“likes, spikes; best, rest, drest, west”. Those of the second verse are slow, deadened, ringing hollowly—“shuns, duns; throe, overflow, row, go”.

There are two lines that might call for special comment. Why should the citizens dream particularly of the south and west, rather than of the north and east? The south is possibly “the land wherein it seemeth always afternoon”. The citizens are figuring to themselves a life of summer days indefinitely prolonged, devoid of threat or of the necessity of labour. The associations of “west” are similar. The “west” is the site of the Isles of the Blessed, Avalon, the Hesperides, Tir-na-n-Og. (The euphemism for death in the last war was “gone west”.) The west is emphatically the place where the sun sets peacefully and untroubled at the end of the day. Some of the associations of “south” are therefore reinforced, and in addition thoughts of death are introduced that are not inappropriate but in ironic contrast to the death-theme as developed in Verse 2.

The other line is the especially significant and arresting—

"And hill-hid tides throb throe on throe."

Two spondees have been substituted for the normal iambic feet. Each word in the line has heavy, breath-exhausting stress: note the succession of the aspirates and the effect it has on the saying of the line. The words move slowly and laboriously, carrying the notion of infinitely weary, constantly repeated toil. "Throe on throe" underlines the suggestions of pain that the threshing beeches have already given, but instead of the fever and self-lacerating fury of their agitation the tides are ponderous with age-old pain.

Why are the tides "hill-hid"? Several sources might contribute to the power of the adjective. There is first the projection of man's sense of hardship into the hill (the "hill of difficulty"); then a sense that in this fixed wave of earth, solid and sodden, a more turgid tide has reared itself, a tide of rock, æons before a humanised landscape was possible. The earth and the waters under the earth are the dominating factors in the final scene as they were in the opening scene of the drama of earth's existence—dumb, non-human, inorganic, possessed of a permanency denied to more evanescent creatures, the thought of them is sufficient to abash all human aspirations. Finally, the adjective seems to shut off any liberating vista. The arena of man's activity is enclosed, stifling, cramping. The tides that are hill-hid are a deep inward central sea whose dull throb of pain reverberates through the crust of the hills—it is never directly glimpsed in the world outside, but is sensed by the mind inwardly, and the sense brings with it a vague unrest amid the numb weariness of the endless, fruitless labour.

PART III

THE STUDY OF POEMS

CHAPTER VIII

THE DIFFICULT POEM

SHOULD the good poem which the children cannot be expected to understand be kept out of the classroom, and its place taken by the poem which the teacher considers to be poor but which he knows the children will understand? Instead of "the good poem" should he only teach the poem "good for children"? The dilemma is awkward, and the decision either way important.

Dr. Bridges, in an introduction to the *Chilswell Book of English Verse*, maintains what he calls the "classical view": "While in other arts it is agreed that the student should only be trained in the best models, wherein technique and æsthetic are both exemplary, there has been with regard to poetry a pestilent notion that the young should be gradually led up to excellence through lower degrees of it; so that teachers have invited their pupils to learn and admire what they expected them to outgrow: and this has been carried so far that writers, who else made no poetical pretence, have good-naturedly composed poems for the young, and in a technique often as inept as their sentiment. This mistake rests on two shallow delusions: first, that beauty needs to be fully apprehended before it can be felt or admired; and, secondly, that the young are unimaginative."

On the other side, there are several who favour a tempering of the poetical wind to the classroom lamb. There is, it is contended, such a thing as the growth of the mind, the development of interests. It would be foolish therefore not to adjust one's poems to the ages of the readers. We should climb the mount of Parnassus by carefully thought-out grades.

There are several good reasons why we should not attempt the meticulous kind of grading that the second school of thought often desires—even if we are not puritanically classical enough to banish from the schools, at every level, all but those poems we consider to be intrinsically excellent. The “good-for-children poem” is possibly only a phantom. And even if we could either construct or select one that would be perfectly suitable for children of seven, or eleven, it would not be desirable to do so. No one wants to supply children year by year with poetic vestments which, year by year, like clothing, will be outgrown and then discarded. Dr. Bridges is so far right.

It would be a mistake, however, if, while subscribing to the classical view, we acted on the belief that there is a mysterious and indefinable essence called “beauty” which is inherent in great poems, and to which we in the classroom are exposing the young mind. We must keep the issue clear. A poem is composed of words. It is to words that the reader is being exposed, and to these that his impressions will refer. The reference may be vague or exact, but reference of some sort it must be. Sometimes the vagueness will be the result of unusedness to the trick of noting from what the impressions derive. This sort of vagueness in the reference will disappear as skill in reading develops. Sometimes the vagueness will be in the nature of the response itself. Not all effects of poems can be clearly and unmistakably localised. Finally there is a vagueness which is actually a valid “liking and knowing not why,” even in the case of the expert reader. It is not a recognition that “I have this particular vague feeling,” but rather is it a hesitation (a vagueness) as to whether the particular feeling experienced is this particular vague feeling, or that particular vague feeling. It is the “vagueness” of the ending of a great tragedy; where, crudely, we say relief and sorrow are “combined,” pity and fear “intermingled,” though we know if we know anything at all that such an intermingling or combination is an outrageous slander on the experience—though we know that in the experience, we feel at one and the same time both the unmitigated pain of

acute sorrow and the sweetness or fortitude of having nothing to bewail: both these things—and how many more—completely separate from one another.

"The greatest poetry is that which can only be vaguely, not clearly, understood." It is in the meaning of this statement of Coleridge's that we must look—if we must look anywhere—for the final justification of the "difficult" poem in the classroom. We want to introduce children to the sort of poetry which will grow as they grow, to which they will be able to resort with pleasure and interest long after they have left school.

The compilers of "Poet's Tongue" sanction the good remark that "those who put poetry on a pedestal only succeed in putting it on the shelf." True: even the subscriber to the "classical doctrine" must not risk defeating his own ends. He will have to be sure of three things: first, that his ideas of "great poems" are not limited; second, that he knows what he is teaching—not "poetry" but *how to read poems*; third, that he knows what stage in reading-ability the class has reached. If he is clear with regard to this latter point, there will be little lost and much gained from taking Blake, or Hopkins, or Shakespeare in class rather than any of the alleged "writers for children." The great poet affords more powerful stimuli, richer meanings than the less great. The child will enjoy playing on the margins of the vast sea as much as dabbling with the petty morn-dew on the maple leaf.

A difficult poem that can be met with in children's anthologies is de la Mare's "Song of the Mad Prince":

Who said, 'Peacock pie'?

The old King to the sparrow.

Who said, 'Crops are ripe'?

Rust to the harrow.

Who said, 'Where sleeps she now,

Where rests she now her head,

Bathed in eve's loveliness'?

That's what I said.

Who said, 'Aye, mum's the word'?
 Sexton to willow.
 Who said, 'Green dusk for dreams,
 Moss for a pillow'?
 Who said, 'All time's delight
 Hath she for narrow bed,
 Life's troubled bubble broken'?
 That's what I said.

This is a good poem to approach through the "associations game": in no other way can its coherence in apparent incoherence be displayed. What is the country of the old King, and why should he speak to a sparrow? What does the remark mean? Why does rust say "Crops are ripe" to the harrow? What has happened before the poem starts, and what is going on throughout the poem? A flock of such queries starts up as soon as the poem has been read.

Dr. I. A. Richards, in "Science and Poetry," (pursuing, maybe, a hint dropped by Robert Graves in his "Poetic Unreason") declares that in this song Mr. de la Mare has made an excursion, almost unique in his poetry, into the world outside his more usual one of escape and retreat, and that the song is a kind of aery promontory flung out from the cloud-mass of "Hamlet." This will prepare the teacher in some measure for what to expect as he goes through it, though it will not help him much in his task of opening out the poem to the class. The reading and exposition of Shakespeare's tragedy is scarcely a practicable introduction to a thirty- or forty-minute lesson.

In structure the poem is like a cartwheel without the cartwheel's rim or hub. The separate parts of the poem—the speakers and what they say—lie like the spokes, quite apart from one another, with no overt connecting links. There is a connection, of course, between the parts, or the poem would not be a poem at all. The non-logical coherence that exists can be readily seen if we try substitutions:

Who said, 'Apple pie'?
The bold King to the blithe.
Who said, 'Crops are ripe'?
Rust to the scythe.

There is a world of difference between the old King and the bold King. Apple pie is a vulgarly jocular and innocent dish compared with that for which—to pander to the stomach—all stateliness and beauty and pride have been ravaged. The flight of the sparrow from the second line and the disappearance of the harrow from the fourth are appreciable losses. Even the phrase 'Crops are ripe' now seems to take on a different meaning: it is a rousing, unambiguous call to action. The difficulty is not that the poem is disjointed but that it is so subtly and finely strung.

Since the song is sung by a Mad Prince, it might be well to start with the idea of madness. What makes people go mad? How do mad people behave? Strain, overwork, silence, noise, love, grief, may all be suggested as possible causes of breakdown. Resort to the poem for evidence as to what it was that brought about the Prince's derangement, quickly isolate love and grief—the desolation of the lover at the death of his sweetheart. When people are mad they behave in peculiar ways—they pretend to be Napoleon, they act like children, they can assume almost any rôle they please. Their talk is disjointed and bizarre, like that in the poem.

An examination of the associations of the key words can next be ventured upon: "Peacock," "Pie," "Old King," "Sparrow."

"Peacock" brings with it notions of majestic beauty and blameworthy vanity. "Pie" carries with it the rich imagery of feasting. By itself quite an innocent, even pleasurable word, when it is abruptly brought out in connexion with "Peacock" there is a sharp impression either of excessive and criminal luxury, or of the violence done to something too beautiful and grand for a mere festive dish. "Old King" is a rich conjunction. There is the obvious father-imagery. There is inevitably (from

the effects of "Peacock Pie") the suggestion of "Four and twenty blackbirds" and fairy-tale (this last coming from the conversation with the sparrow). The fairy-tale associations need to be dwelt on: the rôle of the King in fairy tales is always in some degree sinister. He is the obstacle to the happiness of the Prince, he imposes apparently impossible tasks, asks unfathomable riddles. The sparrow the king talks to is, by contrast with the Peacock, a humble, homely, and familiar bird ("Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing?") He is also, by afterthought, a vulgar, greedy, and quarrelsome brawler.

It will be noticed that each of the words so far examined carries what might be called a positive and a negative charge. The Peacock is beautiful, but vain; the pie is a princely delicacy, but also an unhallowed ravagement; the old King might be sympathised with for his loneliness and craziness, but sinister shadows hover about him; on either view the sparrow will make a fitting companion for him. And over the whole of the first two lines the image of the child immersed in fairy-tale presides—the child spinning a cocoon of glorious "peacock pie" in compensation for the harshnesses and frustrations and difficulties of the actual world: its unreal splendour and its unreal wickedness.

The next fragment of conversation is that between the non-human speakers, rust and harrow. The magical whisper "Crops are ripe" carries with it all the rich promise of fulfilment and fruition, the due and orderly completion of a process which has reached its mellow and prepared-for end. It calls for the crowning effort after which will come a period of complete rest and secure ease. The remark, however, passes from rust to the harrow. This fourth line is wilfully bitter in its grim mixture of cynicism and remorse. A deadening sense of despair is brought in, a feeling of distrust, of unfittedness for the task in hand, of out-of-placeness, hopeless maladaptation. In the voice of the rust there is all the slow corrosion of time, the accumulation of decay on the idle implement. From the call to harvest the recoil is into—*acedia*. Besides the obvious sexton, willow, Mad Prince, Ophelia associations of the poem, this is another point at which

it might seem to lean heavily on *Hamlet*. The occasion of Hamlet's cry to the players, and indeed the whole situation when things are ripe to his purposes and he still delays, filling in the interim with self-accusation and scurrility, might be the situation of these two lines on a magnified scale.

The key to the poem is given, I think, in the last line but one:

"Life's troubled bubble broken."

A bubble involves a tension which is spread out evenly over all its surface (just as in the poem each phrase seems to be a combination of positive and negative forces). A bubble is an expanding thing, though there is a point at which it will burst. A bubble combines sensitiveness and fragility. Lights, distorted images, are reflected in every direction from its surface. Its quivering responsiveness, its constant shaking when "troubled," is a response to forces that threaten its existence, to hurtful things, too great an impact from which will shatter it completely.

The "troubled bubble" fitly images "life." The sphere of human contacts too is a fragile thing, constantly threatened, hypersensitive to the forces which play around it and upon it. It is at the same time limited and narrow. Human activity is limited by cramping conditions, and is mostly a temporising with hurts. Escape from this sphere is thought of as an escape into a fuller, unrestricted, unthreatened existence in which "all time's delight" will be available. But even here the speaker cannot avoid the irony of a further bubble-tension: the word "for" has two meanings, and both will fit. Taking one sense only, the lines would run: "Instead of the (grave's, sickroom's) narrow bed, she will have all time's delight." Taking the other, they become: "She will have all time's delight, but even that will be a narrow bed for her." The thought of the enclosed cramping space of the grave accompanies the lover's defiant assertion that death is really release for a richer, less embarrassed existence than can be enjoyed on earth. In this ambiguity we can see the two opposite pulls on the mind when it attempts to find the full and adequate attitude to death, the

major tension of the mind which makes all other attitudes "bubbles," and which can make the troubled bubble of the mind to break. For the "troubled bubble" is the mind. It is the mind that shakes, stretches, and responds. And the "troubled bubble broken" is the Mad Prince. One of the ways out of the bubble is death; the other is madness. In either, one is beyond both the limitations and the compensations of sanity.

There has always been a feeling with regard to the madman in English Literature, that he alone is qualified to say the comprehensive thing about life and death: others are engaged only in mingled varieties of nonsense. The Mad Prince, outside the bubble, asserts none of those things asserted by the voices that he remembers to have said their say one time when the bubble was unbroken. He neither subscribes to the inconsequential fairy-tale gibberish of the King, nor the sly and empty knowingness of the sexton, nor is he the lover melancholy and tender, filled with longing or with grief. His attitude is both more comprehensive and less comfortable. His madness is a condition more pitiable (though to pity it would be irrelevant) and more wide-awake than any of those that belong to the bubble world.

In the light of the expanding meanings of the "troubled bubble broken" phrase the other phrases take on rich and cunningly directed meanings. We are to regard each of them as a response to some "troubling" of the bubble—the threatening impact bends the bubble's surface, the bubble protecting itself by giving to the threat, so that each distorted image reveals a measure of shrinkage and a measure of stubborn resistance. This explains the negative and positive charge noted in the first four lines (and continued throughout the poem). An especially good instance is the remark of the old King to the sparrow. Round it are gathered all the rainbow refractions of life in the child's mind, the mist of extravagant romance which he enters as his protection against the threats of the real world. In the gloomy hinterland of the old King some faint hint is to be caught of Tereus and Thyestes.

If we took the statements of each interlocutor and separated them from the general context of madness in which they are strung, each would make what we might be inclined to call straightforward sense. The poem can still be read as a delicate lament that is relieved of bitterness by the mustering around the central sorrow of strangely beautiful fancies (death made the occasion for a feast of unambiguous peacock pie). But when we fully appreciate the importance of the Mad Prince's situation such a reading becomes impossible: the meaning of the words lies in the overtones this situation makes possible.

The power of the poem comes from this all-pervading irony: the de-personalised creature who inhabits a world beyond hurt and beyond feeling trying to recover the person who was capable of hurt, of humanity, of varied response to "troublings." It is impossible ever again for the madman to take up any of the human attitudes which the poem confines itself to uttering, attitudes which, when measured against the requirements of the outer air, seem enclosed, restricted, inadequate, *insane*. The insanity of the sane, the abnormality of the normal, is the subject of the poem. The Mad Prince is made to become a supernatural figure rather than a subnormal one: there is a significant difference between him and the old King with whom the poem opens.

The arguments against the "Song of the Mad Prince"—and all such "difficult" poems—as a fit thing for the classroom, generally turn round questions of the child's "experience." "Experience" is a very slippery term. For example, bishops, dons, scientists, undergraduates (despite their combinations of learning and age) can all fail on occasion to gain access to the simplest of poems. Failures to read in the young have been ascribed to "lack of experience"; but when, as one would assume, that deficiency has been remedied, good reading is by no means assured. It is impossible to say how far an individual's "experience" is going to be such as will help him to the "experience" of a poem. Every adult, as well as every child, is confronted in good poetry with something that is strange—a

new situation. The thing is not how much "experience" we have had but how much new experience we are capable of having: it is a question not of "experience" but of "imagination," the ability to knit the new image on to the old knowledge, and to use the new image as a means of advance towards further "experience."

Furthermore, we are at all times apt to exaggerate the advantage the adult has over the child in the matter of even lived-through experience. When we consider how far our most adult behaviour (to take a most unquestionably private example, the behaviour of falling in love) is conditioned by what we have already gathered *long before the actual experience arrives* as to what sort of thing it is, what sort of behaviour is expected, etc.—we should not be overhasty in claiming the advantage for those who have been in love over those who have not. How much adult behaviour is a stale attempt at going over again in actuality what has been gone over before—much more richly—in play or phantasy or fiction? The child's dream or game is the original, the adult behaviour the bit of plagiarism. It was into this aspect of "experience" that Wordsworth had his profoundest insight:

"Behold the Child among the new-born blisses,
A six-years darling of a pigmy size! . . .
See at his feet some little plan or chart,
Some fragment from his dream of human life,
Shaped by himself with newly-learned art;
A Wedding or a Festival,
A Mourning or a Funeral . . .
Filling from time to time his humorous stage
With all the persons down to palsied age,
That life brings with her in her equipage."

The child realises each situation with a sensitiveness and richness to which the adult, when he comes again to play a part in such scenes, can only rarely attain. The glory and the

gleam—the availability of the old knowledge to the new, and the capacity to use experience creatively—have gone.

CHAPTER IX

“LAND DIRGE”

“Call for the robin redbreast and the wren,
Since o’er shady groves they hover,
And with leaves and flowers do cover
The friendless bodies of unburied men;
Call unto his funeral dole
The ant, the fieldmouse, and the mole,
To rear him hillocks that shall keep him warm,
And (when gay tombs are robb’d) sustain no harm:
But keep the wolf far hence that’s foe to men,
For with his nails he’ll dig them up again.”

PALGRAVE christened this poem of John Webster’s “Land Dirge,” following a suggestion of Lamb’s: “I never saw anything like this dirge, except the ditty which reminds Ferdinand of his drowned father in the ‘Tempest.’ As that is of the water, watery, so this is of the earth, earthy.”

Boys of twelve to thirteen enjoyed exploring the background of this piece of Websterian tragedy as much as they appreciated entering into “Full fathom five.” It was quite a revelation to see how much of the Websterian atmosphere they were able to re-create. The method was mainly oral, though the class had slips of paper by them to be used when working out the associations of various words or phrases.

The poem falls into three parts—the first four lines, the four following, and then the last two. Each of the first two “stanzas” ends with a line that is strongly marked off from the others by its difference of tone. The liquid chant of the opening comes

upon the brutal "bodies" and "unburied," demanding a harsh eminence and extra emphasis. In like manner the parenthesis of the eighth line throws a vindictive side-glance in the direction of the "great man" whom Webster always regards as sinister, contemptible, exciting, and malevolent.

The grief, if it can be regarded as grief at all, is ritualised and ceremonial. The writer is maintaining an attitude to his feeling: it is as if he were deliberately "stage-managing" it. It is a lament carefully adjusted to a public occasion; the posture is struck, and then carefully sustained. This does not mean, however, that the poem is sentimental, as is often the case when a writer is concerned more with attitudinising his feeling than with the situation which is alleged to be the occasion for the feeling. (Compare, for example, some of Shelley's 'Golden Treasury' lyrics.) Nor, because the poet is self-conscious in his handling of the feeling does it mean that he is "insincere." The self-consciousness comes from the adjustment of the utterance to the ritual occasion: it is permissible to be rhetorical where rhetoric is not only expected but demanded. The pose escapes sentimentality because of the speaker's confidence that the audience shares the same situation as she does. The voice belongs not to "me" but to "us." It is not an individual strutting before an audience, but a priest speaking for a community.

The "public" nature of the statement can easily be inferred from the imperatives used throughout the poem. It is this imperative mood of the verbs which is largely responsible for keying the poem up to the level of ceremonial loftiness. The self-consciousness of the poet is equally apparent—in the deliberate patterning, the deliberate contrasting of tones, working up to the conscious finale, in the deliberate selection of carefully appropriate sounds and equally appropriate mourners. Everything, without being cheapened, is open and on the surface.

The teacher should be able to indicate these latter aspects of the poem as he is handling its "saying," allowing all the information about the ceremonial incantation braced with

vindictive side-glance to come to the class through his own reading. Quite obviously the discriminations implied in the judgments about "sentimentality" and "self-consciousness" and "attitudinising" could not be handled explicitly with a class that had not the reading experience of, say, a Higher School Certificate form.

The "robin redbreast and the wren" call up "bird" associations and (more especially) the associations of these birds as they are handled in nursery lore. "Robin redbreast" is a deliberate evocation of the child's name for it and the child's attitude to this favourite visitant. It is a term of obvious endearment and tenderness. The smallness, innocent boldness, and pitifulness are uppermost, and the familiarity of the bird to men. It was the robin that plucked the thorn from Christ's head on the cross, according to the legend, and that is how it got its red breast. "When North winds do blow" it is the robin that "must sit in the barn and keep itself warm." The wren is no less endeared to memory by its rôle in nursery story and rhyme, no less innocent, and small, and harmless. (In folk lore the wren is invariably malevolent and to be destroyed.) Their covering of the "friendless bodies of unburied men" with "leaves and flowers" points us emphatically to the story of "The Babes in the Wood," the story of the Wicked Uncles.

These creatures "hover" over "shady groves," a cool, quiet retreat, far distant from the usual scenes of human activity, though human beings (like the Wicked Uncles) can venture into the quietude and outrage it with some deed of horrible and clandestine bloodshed, scaring the birds so that their hovering, instead of being that of guardian spirits, now becomes a reaction of timidity.

"The ant," "the fieldmouse," and "the mole" are again shy, homely, industrious, humble bodies, inoffensive in their operations. (We have to think of the ant that serves as the biblical example to the sluggard, and of the fieldmouse as the simple country cousin of the fable.) They belong to the fields as the birds belong to the woods. "To rear him hillocks that

shall keep him warm" is a stroke of bold naïveté. The word "hillocks" is devoid of any element that would strike a chill. The diminutive form of the word transmits intimacy, and acts almost as a term of endearment. There is all the time a background of suggestions that reminds us of the baby-world. A "hillock" is a hill reduced to the scale appropriate to this world. Delight, wonder, curiosity are the feelings that are evoked by a hillock: we are transported into the fields straightway, and to the workings of the gentle creatures of the fields. There is also the comforting suggestion that these industrious little animals take the covering up of the bodies of unburied men as a part of their daily labours. The task is accepted without demur and with no special disturbance. Normal activities are not interrupted. There is no panic.

"That shall keep him warm" reinforces the suggestions radiating from "hillocks." The close happing of the earth, the cessation of activity—these are being immediately converted into attractions rather than grim deterrents. The grave is a bed, the happing is a seductive one of blankets, and death a safe sound sleep, or (the animal environment makes the inference inevitable) a period of hibernation, a winter sleep. With all this previous preparation the statement of the next line can be readily adopted. In the quietude of the forest, tended by robin and wren, or in the fields—the mounded graveyard now a stretch of green grass hillocked by mole or ant—the dead man will surely "sustain no harm."

The parenthesis—"when gay tombs are robb'd"—opens a window on to a different scene, yet its bitter comment, the macabre satisfaction at the sacrilege involved, is immediately reconcilable with what has gone before. It is the reverse side of the medal. It is the world from which any exit is a thankful release. In a sense the poem exists for the sake of this comment. The poem is not an "escape" poem in the nineteenth century or Edwardian manner. It is not certain that the poet is seeking anodynous alternatives to facing the thought of death so much as seeking an occasion for expressing his feeling about a real

contemporary world—a world he challengingly condemns. There is no hint of vague nostalgia, and no self-pity. Webster's attitude can be contrasted very clearly, on this point, with either Hood's ("We watched her breathing through the night") or Arnold's

"Strew on her roses, roses,
And never a spray of yew;
In quiet she reposes,
And would that I did too."

The feeling in the first seven lines is saved from any suspicion of being sentimental by the fact that we see it to be resting on a basis of clear-sighted fronting of a real world—the world that the audience is recognised as being left to endure.

The words "gay" and "robb'd" have an almost explosive force in utterance. "Gay," bedizened, showy, pompous, rich—the world of Websterian Cardinals and Princes is held up to scorn and indignation: there is also very clearly the innuendo that the great man's fripperies are of as much avail as tinsel against furnace heat when we think that he is maintaining his show in the face of death. "Robb'd" gives us the ironical other half of the world's criminality: both sides are complementary—the great man, and the underworld Arab; both are bred from and breed the same situation: man to man is a wolf.

The last two lines clinch the whole matter. If there are any lingering doubts as to whether or not the poet is sentimentalising, these two lines will certainly banish them. In this poem as in many good poems our attitudes undergo a constant revision, as the new factors in the total experience make their presence felt. We are very far from the nursery world here; and indeed the "nursery" world of the opening lines—is it after all a nursery world? These lines, like the asides in the lines preceding them, force upon us the necessity for widening, stretching, our attitude. They are, to vary the image, the final twist that adjusts the final and complete focus.

The first thing to be noted is that the wolf in the lines is made

as human as men in the foregoing lines are made wolfish. The wolf has *nails* instead of *claws*, and it *digs* the bodies up just as the human robbers of graves might.

The second thing that calls for comment is that there is no sentimentalisation of nature. It is recognised quite clearly that there are wolves as well as robins in the universe, with their own discreet existence. This might seem at first a sufficiently flat platitudinous insight, until we remember how loth most of the confessed "nature" poets have been to admit the existence of wolfishness—the Edwardians as well as the Wordsworthians.

What is the attitude involved? The more one enters into the poem the more one feels that this poem belongs to the age of Heroic Humanism, and expresses a complex of feelings which could only have existed for the adult early Jacobean. Shakespeare's "King Lear" can be sensed as contemporary: the Lear of the Heath as well as the Lear who murmurs ecstatically into the ear of the beloved daughter he has found again, after so much storm and stress:

"Come, let's away to prison;
We two alone will sing like birds i' the cage:
And take upon's the mystery of things
As if we were God's spies: and we'll wear out
Whole packs and sets of great ones
That ebb and flow by the moon."

The wolf is "foe to men." Nature is not a benign fairy-godmother simply. The dichotomy that runs through human nature, is equally apparent in the woods. Man can be kind or he can be wolfish—and in the forests and fields there are wolves as there are wrens. Good and Evil: these are categories that pervade the universe at all organic levels. The suggestion of "foe to men" seems to be that there is something human which is worthy and which ought to be protected, saved. The humanistic notions of microcosm and macrocosm seem to irradiate the poem at this point. "Man is a little world made cunningly."

If we are pointed anywhere to the humanly desirable, surely we can only be pointed back to the central image of humanity in the poem—the implied speaker: the dignified, confident, courageous, contemptuous challenger: the stoically Good Man.

CHAPTER X

THE DISCRIMINATION LESSON

DURING the last ten years, since the publication of Dr. I. A. Richards's book, the activity of English schools has been more and more turned to "practical criticism": the testing of one's ability to read and come to a judgment on what one has read without relying on the second-hand words and phrases (the substitutes for original judgment) which have come to be known as the stock-in-trade of the "Eng. Lit." pedlar. Mr. Dennis Thompson's "Discrimination and Reading" has applied Dr. Richards's methods over a field that would cover sixth form work in discrimination, but as yet there is no collection of material that could be used to the same end in the lower forms of the secondary school or in the senior school. The gap may be filled when the teachers come round more and more to an exploration of the possibilities of the "discrimination" technique, as there is hope that they will do when once they see through the stupidity of that poetry-lesson bastard—"comprehension." The samples for "discrimination" offered here are offered only as samples.

"Discrimination" is merely appreciation, but appreciation that is conducted with the end in view of placing comparable poetic productions in their proper places on an appropriate scale. This may sound very presumptuous, like giving marks to the poets, but it is not this that is meant. Discrimination is merely knowing the differences between our enjoyments. Our

"critical" faculties are also our "appreciative" faculties.

The following two versions of the same border ballad were written upon the blackboard:

First Version.

O it's up in the Hielands
And along the sweet Tay
Did Bonny James Campbell
Ride mony a day.

Saddled and bridled
And bonny rode he;
Hame came horse, hame cam saddle,
But ne'er hame came he.

And doun came his sweet sisters,
Greetin' sae sair,
And doun came his bonny wife
Tearin' her hair.

"My house is unbigged,
My bairn's unborn,
My corn's unshorn,
My meadow lies green."

Second Version.

Hie upon Hielands
And laigh upon Tay,
Bonny George Campbell
Rade out on a day.
Saddled and bridled
And bootied rade he,
Hame cam' his guid horse
But never cam' he.

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Doun ran his auld mithers,
 Greetin' fu' sair,
 Out ran his bonny bride,
 Reavin' her hair.
 "My meadow lies green,
 And my corn is unshorn,
 My barn is to bogg,
 And my babe is unborn."

Saddled and bridled,
 Sae gallant tae see,
 A plume in his helmet,
 A sword at his knee;
 But toom cam' his saddle
 A' bluidy tae see,
 O hame cam' his guid horse,
 But never cam' he.

The problem was introduced to the class as a piece of detective work. One of these is "the original" and the other is "the fake." (Which, in point of fact, came chronologically first does not matter; the point is that one of the poems is demonstrably better than the other, and the class has to find out which.) Attention on this Sherlock Holmes basis was readily aroused.

After both poems have been read through silently several times, if a vote is taken on their respective merits it will generally be found that there is a huge majority in favour of Version two as the "good" poem—as the teacher might expect. It is this version which is calculated to give the quick return. It is, for one thing, "metrically" perfect. It has also an easily seen pattern. The last verse seems to round things off very nicely. This, too, gives it the apparent advantage over Version one. It looks as if this version has had some pains bestowed upon it.

After the vote the versions are examined in order to see what

grounds there are for the decision given, the results of the examination being tabulated.

The treatment of the theme in version one is vivid, immediate, dramatic, wasting no time. Each verse is necessary to the statement of the theme, each verse gives as concisely as possible a different "shot": there is the background over which the rider has travelled many a time in the peaceful performance of his daily business; then in the next verse we get a "close-up" of his setting out "saddled and bridled and bonny" on this particular occasion: immediately followed by the home-coming of the riderless horse. Verse 3 shows us the grief and distraction among the women-folk of the farm, and the last verse focuses on the young widow, newly married, and her words give us a full insight into the extent of the catastrophe when James Campbell fails to come back.

The metre of the first version is irregular, and makes no pretence of being mechanically perfect. It is, however, very cunningly modulated. Each incident, each "shot" has its appropriate rendering in sensitive movement and sound. The metre subtly follows the developing feeling of the poem. The displacement of the lines in the last verse—whether adventitious or deliberate hardly affects the results—gives a splendid impression of distraction, and the ending with the line that does not rhyme is like ending in a minor key. Throughout the poem great sensitiveness is shown to sound-values. The poet is not afraid of repetition. He resorts to assonances and alliteration in a way that is felt to be dictated by the intensity with which he is realising the experience, not by any desire to impress or to display his powers:

"My house is unbigg'd,
My bairn's unborn,
My corn's unshorn,
My meadow lies green."

After examining Version one the class will be almost unanimous that their first decision was wrong. The second version

is narrative-cum-lyrical, and very shoddy work. It has no internal pattern like that of the first version, which follows sensitively the changing experience. In place of this it attempts, in the conventional way, to impose a pattern from the outside: the last verse repeats something that has gone before in a different way. The metre is regularised, mechanical, unmodulated. The distracted bride speaks to the same tune that Bonny George Campbell rides out to, and there is a similar jauntness about the return of the riderless horse. The second version deliberately avoids the repetition of words, yet it strikes the reader as being prolix. The additions really detract from the central situation. Finally in the second version all the delicate sound effects that characterise Version one have been stripped away..

Here are two sets of poems that may be used for further discrimination work:

Translations of a Greek Epitaph.

Original: "I, Dionysius of Tarsus, lie here at sixty, having never married; and I would that my father had not."

- (A) I'm Smith of Stoke, aged sixty-odd,
 I've lived without a dame
 From youth-time on; and would to God
 My Dad had done the same.

T. HARDY.

- (B) Bill Jupp lies here, aged sixty year;
 From Tavistock 'e came.
 Single 'e bided, and 'e wished
 'Is father done the same.

T. E. BROWN.

Three Blacksmith Poems.

- (A) When Vulcan gie's his bellows breath,
 And ploughmen gather wi' their graith,
 O rare to see thee fizz and freath
 I' the lugged caup.
 Then Burnewin comes on like death
 At every chaup!

Nae mercy then for airm or steel;
 The brawnie, banie, ploughman chiel
 Brings hard owreship, wi' sturdy wheel,
 The strong forehammer,
 Till block and studdie ring and reel
 Wi' dinsome clamour.

R. BURNS.

(B) Under a village chestnut tree
 The village smithy stands;
 The smith a mighty man is he,
 With large and sinewy hands;
 And the muscles of his brawny arms
 Are strong as iron bands.

Week in, week out, from morn till night,
 You can hear his bellows blow;
 You can hear him swing his heavy sledge,
 With measured beat and slow,
 Like a sexton ringing the village bell,
 When the evening sun is low.

The children coming home from school
 Look in at the open door;
 They love to see the flaming forge
 And hear the bellows roar,
 And catch the burning sparks that fly
 Like chaff from a threshing floor.

H. W. LONGFELLOW.

(C) Swart smokied smithies
 Drive me to death
 Such noise on nights
 What knavens' cry
 The crook-nosed crows
 And blow their bellows

smattered with smoke
 with din of their dints.
 no men heard never:
 and clattering of knocks!
 cry, after, "Coal! Coal!"
 so that all their brains burst:

"Huf, puf!" says this one
 They spit and sprawl
 They gnaw and gnash,
 And keep themselves hot
 Of a bull's hide are
 Their shanks are sheathed
 Heavy hammers they have
 Stark strokes they strike
 "Lus! Bus!—Las! Das!"
 Such doleful din
 The master lengthens the
 small
 Twines both the twain
 Tik, tak! hic, hac!
 Lus, bus! Las, das!
 All these hoof-parers,
 No man for waterburners

"Haf, paf!" that other.
 and spell many spells;
 they groan together,
 with their hard hammers.
 their leather lap-covers,
 from fiery flinders,
 that hard are handled,
 on a stock of steel;
 roaring strokes in a row—
 the Devil dispell
 and lashes out at this
 lesser still,
 and hits a higher note:
 tiket, taket! tik, tak!
 such a life they lead,
 Christ give them pain!
 at night may have rest.

ANONYMOUS

CHAPTER XI

TWO POEMS ON THE SEA

Roll on, thou deep and dark blue ocean roll!
 Ten thousand fleets sweep over thee in vain;
 Man marks the earth with ruin—his control
 Stops with the shore;—upon the watery plain
 The wrecks are all thy deed, nor doth remain
 A shadow of man's ravage, save his own,
 When for a moment, like a drop of rain,
 He sinks into thy depths, with bubbling groan,
 Without a grave, unknell'd, uncoffin'd and unknown.

Thou glorious mirror, where the Almighty's form
 Glasses itself in tempests; in all time,

Calm or convulsed,—in breeze, or gale, or storm,
 Icing the pole, or in the torrid clime
 Dark-heaving; boundless, endless, and sublime—
 The image of Eternity,—the throne
 Of the Invisible; even from out thy slime
 The monsters of the deep are made; each zone
 Obeys thee; thou goest forth, dread, fathomless, alone.

One of the difficulties of the poetry lesson is to get everybody without exception concentrating his attention on the text. In a free oral lesson the readiest tongues and the willingest workers will tend to take all the work on themselves. Even this is better than the teacher doing all the talking: a member of the class, for boys of his own age, will always be a better poetic middleman than the teacher. But the oral lesson in which one or two predominate—better though it may be than the lesson in which the teacher tends to talk all the time, is never ideal. One always wants the whole class to be occupied individually, as far as possible. How, apart from the deceptively named "comprehension lesson," in which everyone is answering questions on a given poem, can this be engineered? The following is a suggestion that can become the basis for general operations on poems. It is a form of *directed* examination; it is not, that is, completely in the hands of the class: the class works along lines given by the teacher. It is a form of compromise between the "comprehension lesson," and the unrestrictedly free oral lesson. The poem might be the above stanzas on "The Sea" from Byron's "Childe Harold."

The class is split up into committees, each with a line of investigation given them. These are:

(a) *The Words:*

Simple, or difficult: familiar or strange; short or long:

(Make sure you know the meaning of the long words, by looking them up in the dictionary. Make a list of hard

words with their simpler equivalents. Think of any reasons that might make a person use *long* or *hard* words where there are shorter and simpler words that would do.)

(b) *The Adjectives:*

Are there many? (Count them and compare them with the number of nouns).

Do they occur in groups? How do they occur, and where?

(c) *The Structure of the Verses:*

The metre.

The rhymes.

The length of the lines.

Does the poet work up to any one point, in either of the stanzas, or are the stanzas all on a level?

How are the stanzas built up?

(d) *Literary Tricks of Expression:*

(Anything worthy of comment apart from those aspects handled under (a), (b), and (c); e.g. use of exclamation marks, repetition, exaggeration, accumulation, contrast.)

(e) How should the poem be said?

The committees work together in groups on their own particular line, and after ten minutes or a quarter of an hour give their reports, through the chairman they select.

The first committee might tabulate "ocean," "ravage," "unknell'd," "uncoffin'd," "convulsed," "torrid clime," "sublime," "Eternity," "invisible," "zone," "fathomless"—with their simpler equivalents "sea," "plunder," "not buried properly," "stormy," "warm parts of the globe," "great," "Everlastingness," "unseen," "region," "bottomless." The reasons given for the use of such words as occur in the first list in preference to the words of the second list might be multifarious. The poet "wants to show off." The words used "fit in with the metre," the poet "wants to impress us." What

with? He wants to make his description impressive. Why? Because what he is writing about is impressive. (It will be fortunate for the lesson if this point about the intention of the poet to "*impress*" is made early. If it is not, however, it is almost certain to be made at some later stage. At the very end it is almost bound to crop up in some form or other under the heading "How the poem should be said and why.")

The committee on adjectives will report that there are roughly a score of adjectives, and (this is most important) they tend to accumulate, to occur in groups of "three." There is "deep and dark blue ocean," "unknell'd, uncoffin'd and unknown," "boundless, endless, and sublime," and "dread, fathomless, alone." Of these groups the last three occur at points in the poem which seem to be significant: it is as if they were the culmination of a kind of paragraph. The first group occurs in the very first line—as if the poet right from the beginning were wishing to be particularly impressive.

The third group will be able to illuminate further the second committee's findings. They may not know that the stanza Byron is using is called Spenserian, and that the last line of the Spenserian stanza is an "Alexandrine," but they will be able to define the metre as iambic, and the length of the lines as ten syllables in the first eight lines of each verse and twelve in the last. They may be capable of suggesting that the stanza seems built for a convincing conclusion—something said and elaborated in the verse and emphatically brought to an end in the extra-long last line. That each stanza is a unity in itself is suggested by the rhyme-scheme (ababbcbcc), which shows a deliberate interweaving. At the same time there is room inside the stanza for some variety and development of the unifying theme. Thus the first stanza begins with the resounding address to the ocean. The second line applies itself to building up the idea of the grandeur and might of the ocean still further; but to do this it introduces man's works, his fleets which sweep over the ocean without making any enduring mark upon it. Then this new idea is expanded. Man can devastate and scar the earth, but he is

powerless to control the sea. On the contrary: man's savagery is puny compared with the sea's. The remaining lines of the stanza portray man's futile smallness and fragility when he is brought into contest with the ocean. He can destroy nothing, on the sea, save himself.

The second stanza develops the notion of the sea as "the throne of the Invisible." The idea is given accumulative expression. What development there is inside the stanza consists in the gradual shift of focus from the Almighty to the sea, as if the poet did not wish anything to be considered greater than the subject of his verse. In the last three lines the transference from the "Almighty" to the "sea" is complete: the sea has absorbed the qualities of the deity: it creates, it commands, it is awe-ful, bottomless and alone.

The fourth committee should have quite a fair amount of material to hand under the headings suggested. Exaggeration ("ten thousand fleets"—"like a drop of rain"), accumulation (the adjectives, the phrasing of the second stanza), exclamation—all these tricks of the rhetorician are well represented. Contrast is the main mechanism of the poem. There is the broad contrast which lays down the guiding lines of the first verse—that of the mighty sea, and puny man (the "drop of rain"). Then there are the series of contrasts in verse two. The attempt to inflate and to impress is at the source of the poetic impulse in this poem, and the children should be got to realise how central this motive is for the whole thing. The poet is overstrained and not quite wary enough in the means he resorts to. There is a danger in that picture of the drowning man sinking "with bubbling groan." Some of us might be moved to laughter rather than awe if we dwell on it for long. (Children definitely laugh if the phrase is examined, and they have to explain it). The poet, straining at the camel, swallows the gnat.

The most interesting and important "committee" will be the last one. A small committee of two is maybe advisable—and they should be two of the best boys, able to study and get to know the poem, able to seize on hints from the other com-

mittees and synthesise them, and able to say poetry in accordance with their ideas about how it should be said. At the end of the committees' reports, one can give a lecture on the poem, summing up and explaining how all that the committees have said has decided how the poem will be rendered; and the other can be the artist giving the rendering according to his colleague's exposition.

If there is time left, the poem can be said by the whole of the class, the teacher conducting. The saying should be wildly oratorical—even melodramatic. Just look at the dramatic pauses—the way the pauses at the end of the line reinforce the pauses required by the syntactical phrasing! You can sense the strut and the gesture and the pose behind every word:

Roll on / thou deep and dark blue ocean / ROLL!
 Ten *thousand* fleets sweep over THEE / in VAIN!
 MAN marks the *earth* with ruin / his control /
 Stops with the shore / upon the watery plain /
 The WRECKS are all THY deed / nor doth remain
 A SHADOW of man's ravage / save HIS OWN /
 When (for a moment) like a drop of rain /
 He sinks into thy depths / with *bubbling* groan /
 Without a grave / unknell'd / uncoffin'd /
 and UN- KNOWN

John Freeman's poem, "The Sleeping Sea," is a good one to contrast with Byron's:

The sea,
 Was ever as a little child that sleeps
 And keeps
 All night its great unconsciousness of day.
 No spray
 Flashed when the wave rose, drooped, and slowly drew
 away.
 No sound

From all the slumbering, full-bosomed, water came;
 The sea
 Lay mute in childlike sleep, the moon was as a candle flame.
 No sound
 Save when a faint and moth-like air fluttered around.
 No sound
 But as a child that dreams, and in his full sleep cries,
 So turned the sleeping sea and heaved her bosom of slow
 sighs.

Here is a good contrast in technique. Here is repetition and accumulation—but for the effect of intensity, and simplicity. The rhythm and rhyme of the poem are suited to the subject. Here is a poet preparing a climax too. And here is a good test of the class's ability to get down in table form the parallel the poet is making between the sea, the wind, and the moon, and the sleeping child, the candle, and the moth fluttering in the bedroom.

CHAPTER XII

THE USE OF AN ANTHOLOGY

FOR the most part in these chapters, the method of teaching poetry that has been assumed has been that in which the teacher has been the dominant personage in the partnership which every good lesson is. And there are good reasons for making the poetry lesson an affair of the teacher's lead. How to read properly is a thing that needs demonstrating as much as any piece of gymnastic work or any new step in mathematics. Children need to have their eyes sharpened by being shown things they would otherwise never see in a month of Sundays. Children need a middleman to facilitate the transmittance of the social heritage—to tell them what Poetic Licence is, what Poetic Diction is, what Metre is, and what a thousand other things are for which literary criticism has discovered no name.

But the method that relies only on the teacher's lead is dangerous.

The actual acquisition of the class in the matter of personal discriminating power—the power of any individual in the class to form a fair judgment of his own on some new poem—may be cloaked if the class is not really exploring and discovering new territory but rather dogging in a dutiful way the teacher's trail-blazings. It is only too easy for a teacher to mistake the reaction to his own unconscious suggestions for extreme originality. It is also very difficult for a class to develop confidence in front of a strange poem if they have not been given abundant opportunities of tackling a poem on their own.

From the teacher's point of view a tremendous amount can be learnt from inverting the usual mode of approach. Instead of watching the class (as I heard one expert of this "inverted" method put it) placing its footsteps neatly and unerringly, like Good King Wenceslas's Page, where the master's steps have trod, you discover what are the natural lines of approach for the class: the natural lines of cleavage of this particular poem for this particular group of children. Their tracks may zigzag; they may reconnoitre in wildly fanciful circles; they may cautiously sniff all about the thing and around it before deciding to seize it; they may have a fondness for getting to Beachy Head by way of Blackpool Pier—they may commit every reading fault and almost exhaust the teacher's patience; but this will be *their* way and not his. And in time, especially under the pressure of group criticism and comparison of results, the path will gradually become less devious. At first, of course, instinct will naturally make the approach tortuously tentative, or rashly haphazard.

You will explain to the class that if they will only make it possible you want to disappear from the horizon of the poetry lesson altogether, while they tackle among themselves the poem before them. It must be made quite clear that everything they say—even if it is wrong—is right: until, of course, someone points out why it cannot be right. If somebody makes a howler

—for example, if in the poem on Robert, Earl of Dudley, “the noble warrior who never blooded sword” and “the noble councillor who never kept his word” is said to be “a peaceful man who did a lot of good for his district”—then it is up to someone to point out that this is ridiculous, because the poem says later on that this is the Earl of Dudley “whom all the world did hate.” By a process of self-correction the class arrives at a consistent and accurate account of what the poem is saying. Even the person who commits the howler will have fulfilled a useful purpose in the lesson: he will have sharpened the outline of the right construction that has to be put on the words; he will also have brought home to the class, in a way that no amount of sermonising could better, the dangers of hasty reading, irrelevant association, wrong deductions from evidence; and he will have done this in terms that the class can understand—without any *récherché* wrappings of psychological jargon, without any adult aloofness of vision, and without any *ex cathedra* edict from the high-legged chair.

When the poem has been thoroughly comprehended and all that the poem says has been made quite clear, then the class is asked to proceed to the saying of things of a different sort about the poem. The teacher’s task is to be the right sort of catalytic agent. He underlines the significant statements with a casualness as artfully artless as he can make it, inducing the class to follow up the right lead rather than the wrong one as far as possible. The metre, the sorts of adjectives, whether the poet distorts words and alters the normal order or not, the patterning introduced into the poem, whether this poem is like the one they did last week or not, whether they like it better or worse and why, what sort of a man the writer seems to be, what sort of a society it is that he lives in, what sort of people he is writing for, what sorts of feelings he is pouring into his poetry, what sorts of feelings he is keeping out—all these topics, though not all in the same lesson, will crop up and be given actual relevance to the question of Poetry, what Poetry does, how Poetry does it, what Poetry is, and how Poetry varies.

This sort of method is the obvious one for developing confidence before poetry. Its aim is to get individuals to apply their wits to the thing, and to understand their enjoyments. And it is obviously this that is required to be developed in children before they leave school altogether. It is obviously to cater for this that an Anthology exists. Anthologies are for private reading, and if the class has an anthology the lesson should be based on the assumption that it is private reading that has to be forwarded and aided—not something that could exist quite apart from an anthology. Choral speaking is all very well—it gives children an actual enjoyment of a poem; it awakens in them positive reactions, and not negative ones of the sort Arnold Bennett describes when the word "Poetry" is mentioned; it gets them to read and enter into poems, and does not spread a general worry over the subject—but it might not assist the individual when he is sitting all alone over a book of poems.

The best method of procedure in using the anthology is the "sorting" method: one anchor point is established—or one touchstone worked out—and from this the class goes on to chart out the whole series of poems, or as many of them as it is thought desirable to consider. A good starting-point might be "the poem we like best." Someone chances on a poem that especially recommends itself to him, and gives his account of it. This is sufficient to start the ball rolling, and it can roll in any direction. Suppose, for example, the anthology happens to be the *Ring of Words*, Book II, and the starting-point is Gould's "Wanderthirst":

"Beyond the East the Sunrise; beyond the West the Sea,
And East and West the Wander-Thirst that will not let me
be;
It works in me like madness to bid me say goodbye,
For the seas call, and the stars call, and oh! the call of the
sky.

I know not where the white road runs, nor what the blue
hills are,
But a man can have the sun for friend, and for his guide a
star;
And there's no end of voyaging when once the voice is
heard,
For the rivers call, and the road calls, and oh! the call of a
bird!

Yonder the long horizon lies, and there by night and day
The old ships draw to home again, the young ships sail
away;
And come I may, but go I must, and if men ask me why,
You may put the blame on the stars and the sun, and the
white road, and the sky."

The discoverer says his say and then there is free discussion both of his comment and of the poem until a fairly exhaustive analysis has been made.

The poem is a poem of longing, of the longing to escape from the humdrum world of everyday and participate in the vast vague adventurousness of the world beyond the horizon. The core of longing is discontent, and the bedfellow of discontent is the daydream. The young man might be discontented with the dreariness of his everyday life, its safety and lack of appeal to the imagination; his reaction is to pursue a life which apparently offers the opposite, and one which incorporates many of the elements of the adolescent daydream. Some time may be spent discussing the why and wherefore of daydreams, as the idea will serve as a pointer to other poems of a similar sort. Even if it means that the poem itself is left behind in the stream of the discussion, a good purpose will have been served if the mechanism of the daydream has been clearly seen. The daydream, with its basis in self-pity and self-glorification, supplies quite a large section of some school anthologies that include "modern" poetry. So much so, that in some cases there is even a danger

of day-dream and modern poetry being equated in the school-boy's mind.

After one class had finished with "Wanderthirst," they were asked to look through the anthology for a poem that was "exactly the same, only the opposite." The paradox passed unnoticed, and it was not long before "The little waves of Breffny" and "Corrymeela" emerged, with Padraic Colum's "The Old Woman of the Roads" in the rear.

This group of poems not only emphasised the ideas started in connection with the original "Wanderthirst," but they made new ideas possible. They made possible shrewd guesses at the dates of the poems, and this in its turn opened out an exciting prospect. If this group could be sorted and "dated," what was there to prevent an extension of the system of sorting and dating to all the poems in the book? The notion that whole batches of poems could share several common characteristics, and the possibility that if you examined them closely enough you could by sheer detective work find out not only what sort of a person was responsible for writing them, but also when he lived, made poems come alive in an altogether new way. This was history really alive.

A time-chart can be worked out quite easily following the lines suggested above. The history of literature as the history of the ways people have lived and experienced and been able to communicate is an important thing; but unfortunately it is often quite impossible to introduce any "history of literature" into one's English syllabus. The time-chart worked out by the class as a record of their insights into poems will to some degree make up for the deficiency, and in so far as it is a record of their own immediate contacts with poems, it will be free from the dry-as-dust tradition of "Eng. Lit."

The lessons after those devoted to the pre-war "longing" poems continued to be devoted to the search for "poems the same, but different." On one occasion, along with Masfield's "Tewkesbury Road," Hood's "I remember, I remember," and Stevenson's "The Vagabond," Samuel Rogers' "Dear is my

little native vale" made its appearance. It will serve as a good illustration of the problems connected with "dating":

"Dear is my little native vale,
The ring-dove builds and murmurs there;
Close by my cot she tells her tale
To every passing villager;
The squirrel leaps from tree to tree,
And shells his nuts at liberty.

In orange groves and myrtle-bowers
That breathe a gale of fragrance round,
I charm the fairy-footed hours
With my loved lute's romantic sound;
Or crowns of living laurel weave
For those that win the race at eve.

The shepherd's horn at break of day,
The ballet danced in twilight glade,
The canzonet and roundelay
Sung in the silent greenwood shade:
These simple joys that never fail
Shall bind me to my native vale."

The difference in convention between this "escapism" and that of the pre-war poems is readily seen. This poem shows us a man quite as bent on the simple life as the writers in the "Wanderthirst" manner, but, unlike them, not prepared to jettison any of the sophistication he has won through wide travel and a gentlemanly education. He is resolved to make the country conform to the culture he is imbued with, it may be because this very culture is no longer able to be sustained in the towns where it has been acquired. His nature is certainly not permitted to be wild: it must be fenced in. The writer is looking out from the tasteful country squire's hall over a nature that is definitely methodised. The orange grove and myrtle-bower are

graceful aliens, imported luxuries; the English farm-labourer becomes a shepherd blowing his horn in the morning and joining in classical games for laurel wreaths when his day's work is done; in the competition for genteel approval the ballet and the canzonet share the honours with the native (but scrupulously archaic) roundelay.

The leisure employment of the poet is to improvise a plaintive air on the lute, his melancholy mingling with the gales of fragrance that entwine him, or else to fashion (we presume) those laurel awards for his sportive employees Phyllis and Corydon. In gentlemanly inactivity thus the hours are sped, not with a hectic rush, nor with any intent to indulge a savage vendetta against time, but "fairy-footed": because fairies, like the romantic and soulful lute, are just coming into fashion. But in the meanwhile the cultured gentleman of cosmopolitan tastes woven over a classical education is free to dally with the Goth as with the Hellene, and remain delicately superior to both.

The man who wrote this poem was not likely to be taken in by what he was writing. We have a feeling that he is indulging a mood, but in a spirit of wakeful dalliance, committed as a person to nothing his poem might seem to be saying. Edwardian writers do not leave us with this impression. In their case it seems that the poet is deeply involved in the attitudes the day-dream convention caters for. He might almost be said to be self-deceived. The Edwardian poem belongs with a seriously held cult, its present-day followers being the week-ender and hiker. The poem of the late-eighteenth-century gentleman belongs to the late-eighteenth-century gentleman, and it only states a marginal mood. The gentleman has behind him a bigger reserve of wisdom and sanity and intellectual interest than gets into the poem, and it is this reserve he would draw upon to guide him in his behaviour if ever he should be called upon to act or take decisions. His poetry is not that of the naked savage, nor of the social man with a nostalgia for nudity. He carries his dress with him to the country, and even

contrives that nature and countryfolk shall conform to his standards. In "Tewkesbury Road" we see the opposite. Man goes out into nature and in the out-going divests himself of his superiority. We get as a result an impression of "sincerity" or self-involvement, an impression anyhow that the individual is wholeheartedly in for it without any reservations. The consequence is a sense of self-abandonment, that will not recognise very clearly the line that separates strong feeling from sentimentality—all those things, in fact, which go with *cultus*.

Needless to say, the class does not get all this out of the poems examined—at least, not in so many words. But the surprising thing is that they can approximate fairly closely in their own terms to this discrimination, and as the chart of their reading grows, so does confidence in the application of their developing standards of good writing, their knowledge of themselves and of what they read.

Dating a poem is not an alternative to enjoying it. Often it is the method one's enjoyment adopts to make itself explicit.

The anthology, therefore, even the worst anthology conceivable, has a place among the essential apparatus of the English teacher in the school. The two-poem lesson can be catered for by it; the "history" of poetry (if anyone wants it) can only be satisfactorily managed alongside familiarity with it; comparisons of different poets (the kind of words they use, the imagery they are most fond of, the themes they handle) and comparisons of different ages of poetry—all these are made possible by the good anthology. Most important of all the anthology caters for the individual's private hunting, delving, leisure reading, and unforced memorisation. The anthology is the symbol not of the bondage of the scholar but of his emancipation from leading-strings of any sort. The anthology should be a constant reminder to the teacher that his task is to keep clear the paths the individual child wants to take to poems. Occasionally it might suggest to him too the possibility of his own superfluity—if his teaching has been successful.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

I. GENERAL.

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| MAUD BODKIN | <i>Archetypal Patterns in Poetry</i> (O.U.P.) |
| T. S. ELIOT | <i>Selected Essays</i> (Faber) |
| A. R. ENTWISTLE | <i>The Study of Poetry</i> (Nelson) |
| W. EMPSON | <i>Seven Types of Ambiguity</i>
(Chatto & Windus) |
| R. GRAVES | <i>Poetic Unreason</i> (Cecil Palmer) |
| R. GRAVES and
LAURA RIDING | <i>Pamphlet against Anthologies</i>
(Heinemann) |
| PHILIP GURREY | <i>The Appreciation of Poetry</i> (O.U.P.) |
| L. S. HARRIS | <i>The Nature of English Poetry</i> (Dent) |
| A. E. HOUSMAN | <i>The Name and Nature of Poetry</i>
(C.U.P.) |
| J. H. JAGGER | <i>Poetry in School</i> (Univ. of Lond.) |
| FRANK KENDON | <i>The Adventure of Poetry</i>
(A. & C. Black) |
| F. R. LEAVIS | <i>Revaluations</i> (Chatto & Windus) |
| P. B. H. LYON | <i>The Discovery of Poetry</i> (Arnold) |
| SIR HENRY NEWBOLT | <i>A New Study of English Poetry</i>
(Constable) |
| SIR R. PAGET | <i>Human Speech</i> (Kegan Paul) |
| I. A. RICHARDS | <i>Science and Poetry</i> (Kegan Paul) |
| | <i>Principles of Literary Criticism</i>
(Kegan Paul) |
| | <i>Practical Criticism</i> (Kegan Paul) |
| E. M. W. TILLYARD | <i>Poetry Direct and Oblique</i>
(Chatto & Windus) |
| DENYS THOMPSON | <i>Discrimination and Reading</i>
(Chatto & Windus) |
| SOCIETY FOR TEACHERS
OF ENGLISH | <i>Teaching Poetry</i> (O.U.P.) |

II. BALLADS, ETC.

OXFORD BOOK OF BALLADS (O.U.P.)

IRENE MAWER *The Art of Mime* (Methuen)

I. CHISMAN and

G. WILES *Mimes and Miming* (Nelson)MARJORIE GULLAN *Spoken Poetry in the Schools* (Methuen)A. H. BODY *The Music of Poetry* (Nelson)

III. ANTHOLOGIES.

W. H. AUDEN and

JOHN GARRETT *The Poet's Tongue* (G. Bell & Sons)

OXFORD BOOK OF ENGLISH VERSE (O.U.P.)

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